Palmtop

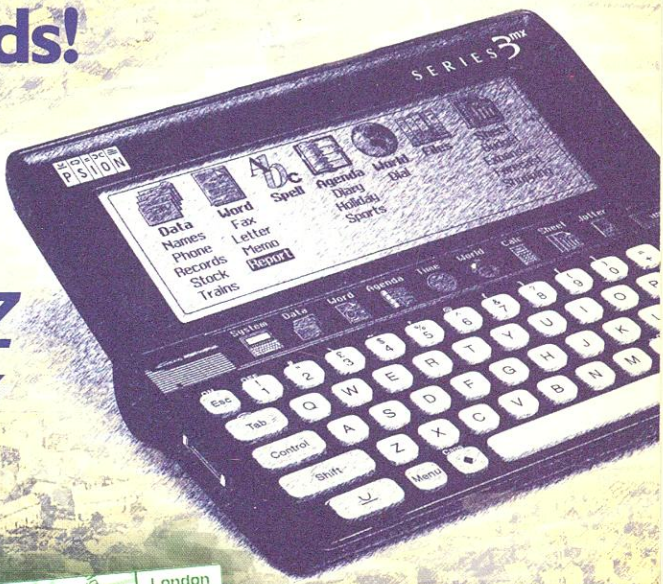
The journal for today's Psion user

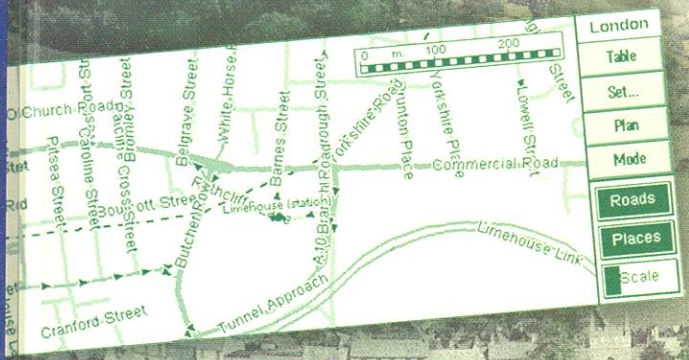
Issue 20 Bimonthly

The SERIES 3 gets Steroids!

mx High Speed Processor

The New 28MHZ 3mx





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The journal for today's Psion user

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Submissions

Any contributions of material published within the pages of *PALMTOP* (excluding 'On The Net') will earn the author a minimum of one free issue added to their subscription. If you wish to write feature articles for the magazine then please contact the editor to discuss your ideas.

Back Issues

All issues are available at £4 each in the UK, £4.50 in Europe, and £5.50 elsewhere. All prices include postage. Just send payment in the usual way, stating which issues you require.

Subscriptions

PALMTOP is available by subscription only from the address given above, price £24 within the UK, £27 in Europe and £33 worldwide. Price covers 6 issues and all postage (and airmail costs for European/worldwide subscriptions). VAT is not payable on *PALMTOP*.

Payment for subscriptions or back issues can be made by cheque or Money Order (payable to '*PALMTOP PUBLICATIONS*') in UK FUNDS ONLY. Payments can also be made using VISA, MASTERCARD, AMERICAN EXPRESS, EUROCARD, DELTA, JCB, ACCESS, SOLO and SWITCH cards. Please call, fax, post or email your card details.

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(Volume 4, issue 2)

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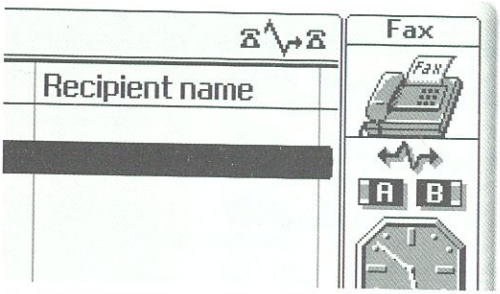

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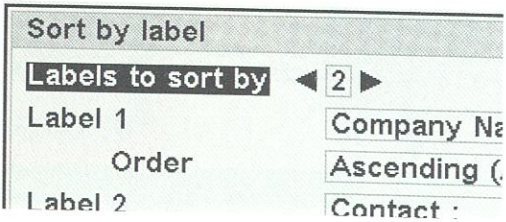

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Editorial

Something's going on. The much-discussed ROM version 1.1 for the Series 5 is now at least five months overdue, based upon Psion's own press announcement of more than a year ago.

Not only is there still no official release date for the upgrade, but there's also no sign of the usual rumours that tend to surface within the industry just before something of this (reputed) magnitude appears on the streets.

Now is traditionally the time of year when Psion 'like' to launch new products (most recently the Series 3c, Siena and 3mx), giving them plenty of time for the products to get into the retail channel ready for Christmas. The reason why the Series 5 was released a few months before this 'traditional' time was probably just to get the jump on the (then) forthcoming Windows CE release.

The release date (September) for EasyGSM, Psion's software modem, has also come and gone without trace, as has any word on Psion's implementation of JAVA on the Series 5 platform. Now both soft-modems and JAVA engines are pretty processor-hungry beasts, and if I were running things at Psion, I'd prefer to keep quiet about lack-lustre prototypes of these products on the test bench, instead waiting to release more capable versions of them, running on a faster StrongArm processor. There's little doubt that Psion *are* working on a StrongArm version of the Series 5, and for my money I think that all plans for an interim Series 5 release with an updated ROM will be shelved in deference to a new 'Series 5a' or similar due out sometime next year.

A new machine with vastly enhanced Strong-Arm processor power could make a software modem and JAVA a reality, address the Series 5's so-so web browser speed (particularly compared with browsers running under CE2), and generally give a very capable but slow-ish computer a much-needed shot in the arm. Of course, Psion may just be happy enough with colour screen developments by then to give the '5a' a full colour screen at the same time, something already fully supported by the underlying EPOC operating system and just waiting to be implemented.

Now, 16 months after the inception of the Series 5, the release of a 'new' machine sporting ROM 1.1 alone may give the wrong message in the consumer marketplace: that a few software updates are all that Psion can muster after more than a year of silence. Much better that they hoard a whole raft of software and hardware enhancements ready for a big, impressive, combined roll-out later in 1999.

Frustrating for existing Series 5 users, perhaps, but it's important to realise that the *average* Series 5 user has never even heard of ROM 1.1, and isn't waiting in anticipation for it as are many, more informed, *Palmtop* readers. But if the first appearance of the improved ROM were to be on a completely new machine then will existing owners still be able to upgrade? Who knows? The whole prospect of having users return machines for ROM swaps, and the associated wrangling of who should and should not be eligible for free or reduced-rate upgrades by virtue of recent purchases was always going to be something of a logistical nightmare for Psion. I just

wonder whether they may instead decide to use a physically different ROM socket on the new machine, thus giving at least a half-believable reason why such an upgrade may never actually see the light of day. All speculation, of course—but again, if I were running Psion, I'd see it as a possible way out of quite a few headaches.

Strategically, Psion's biggest concern *has to be* Windows CE. Half-hearted upgrades to their flagship product will contribute to Psion being sidelined by Microsoft's brainchild. The fanfare release of a faster, better machine with some seriously improved functionality will give them the mainstream press attention they need to keep the word 'Psion' synonymous with palmtop computers into the next millennium. Given sufficient effort, the undoubted superiority of EPOC can still win through, even against the might of the Microsoft empire. To this end, we should all hope that the next Psion model to appear will represent nothing short of a handheld computing landmark.

And what of other developments in the EPOC arena? The Symbian partners are clearly all working on their own killer palmtops/communicators (their whole reason to join the party in the first place), and together with Geofox (who are reporting healthy sales of their first foray into EPOC, the Geofox One) must all be spiralling towards new product releases in 1999.

And where does the Series 3mx stand within this grand scheme? The Series 3 has always been a darling in Psion's eyes—the product that took their success onto a new plane. Though sales of the 3c have dwindled somewhat since the release of the Series 5, what better ploy than to undertake the relatively modest task of clocking it to three times the speed, painting the casing a different colour, and re-releasing it as a super-slick personal organiser? Given the almost 100 percent compatibility with thousands of existing software programs, the repackaging of the Series 3 gives a long-established product a further lease of life in its twilight years, not to mention some increased sales of all the software and peripherals that go with it.

Of course, people will rightly complain that PsiWin and PsiMail Internet connectivity software should have been bundled in at the price, but maybe Psion will see reason and do so in the near future.

Speaking to a number of independent dealers, 3mx sales are surprisingly brisk, vindicating Psion's decision to give the trusty Series 3 one last turn.

From the point of view of *Palmtop* magazine, there has never been more to write about, never more impending product releases to strengthen the platform, and never more reason to increase our page count yet again, this time to 128 pages. Upwards and forever onwards...

Steve Clack - October 1998

Palmtop is...

Steve Clack - Publishing Editor

Rosemary Rolfe - Distribution Manager

Pete Sipple - Contributing Editor

Steve Litchfield - Contributing Editor

Leigh Edwards - Technical Consultant

Thanks... to all the contributors whose names appear within the magazine. Thanks also to all those who have kindly supplied their products for evaluation.

Newsreel

What's new in the Psion world...

Series 3mx released

In early September, Psion released a new replacement for the Series 3c, the 3mx. The 3mx incorporates identical built-in software to the 3c, but sports a 28Mhz processor, making it some three times faster than the previous models. The Series 3mx has an initial RRP of £269.95 including VAT, and is only available in a 2MB, backlit version. Psion are not planning to release the 3mx in the U.S.A. at present. See page 24 for a full review.

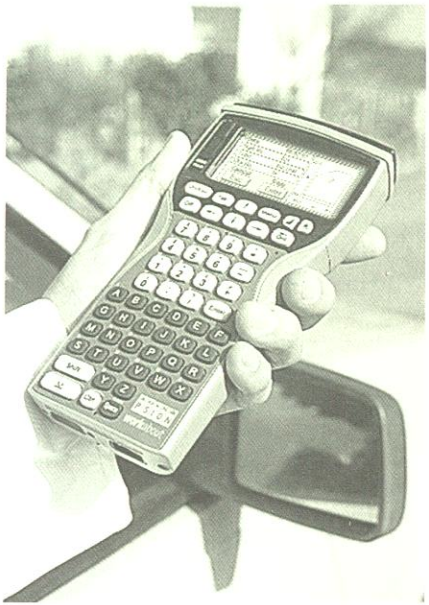
New Limited Edition Series 5

A new, 'Limited Edition' Series 5 should be available by the time you read this. The 'Pearlescent' Series 5 in Aqua Green will be on sale with a leather Mulberry slip case. The case is in smooth tan leather and trimmed with the trademark Mulberry Tree on the fastener.

The built-in software is identical to the existing ROM 1.01 machines currently shipping.

The Series 5 Limited Edition will be available from Dixons and John Lewis, priced at £449.95 including VAT. The Mulberry case is redeemed using a voucher which comes with the Series 5 Limited Edition.

We have already examined these new machines in detail, and can report that the subtle metallic green finish is very attractive. It's also worthwhile to note that the paint used is solvent-based, unlike that on previous Series 5s, so is far more durable (see Editor's notes on page 21).



Brisk 3mx sales reported

A number of independent UK Psion dealers are reporting brisk sales of the new Series 3mx, following its launch in early September.

Contact Psion sales: 0990 143050

Workabout mx

The new *Workabout mx* from Psion Industrial offers a high speed 'mx' processor just like the new Series 3mx, and adds an infrared (IrDA) port for file transfer and printing.

The new technology will enable users to transfer data six times more quickly, and mx machines include integrated auto-id versions with barcode reading technologies and barcode wands, together with laser scanners for high speed non-contact scanning.

As a special feature in the next issue we'll be testing out a new Workabout mx.

Psion Industrial: 0990 134976 (sales)
email: ind-sales@psion.com

Still no news on ROM 1.1

The mystery of the fabled ROM 1.1 update for the Series 5 continues, with most official Psion representatives denying any knowledge of the project. It now seems unlikely that the upgrade will appear before 1999, though Psion declined to comment.

PsiWin 2.2 and more...

Another update to PsiWin, version 2.2, is now being shipped with all new Series 5s. The new version also replaces PsiWin 1.1 for the Series 3 and Siena range, bringing full Windows 95 Explorer integration plus drag and drop to the 16-bit machines. Series 3/Siena users can purchase PsiWin 2.2 complete with cable for £49.95 including VAT. Those already in possession of a cable can get the software alone for £29.95. Series 5 users will soon be able to upgrade their existing PsiWin 2.1 with a free downloadable 'Service Pack' (see PsiWin 2.2 review on page 29 for more details).

Message Suite 1.52

The latest update to the Series 5 Message Suite email/web/faxing software includes support for multiple mailboxes and email attachments, together with other minor tweaks. See our review on page 32 for further details.

Message Suite 1.52 is available for free download from *www.psion.com* and will appear on our own CD-ROM from CD05 onwards.

Emulator copyright woes...

Symbian's EPOC emulator got off to a false start, being withdrawn by the company a week after initial release due to legal wranglings with STNC, the programmers behind the EPOC web browser. As we write this the legal tussle is still going on, although insiders at Symbian expect the situation to be resolved within a matter of weeks.

Following a settlement, both the emulator and the C++ Software Development Kit should be available for download again, and the emulator will hopefully appear on our CD-ROM shortly afterwards.

STILL no printer drivers

For reasons still unknown, Psion have *still* not made the updated Series 5 printer drivers available publicly, five months after their initial announcement, claiming they are still being 'beta tested'. They include a brand new driver for the Canon bubble-jets and updates to four of the built-in ROM drivers. If you need these drivers urgently, we suggest that you contact Psion Technical Support and ask nicely...

Psion Technical Support: 0990 143061

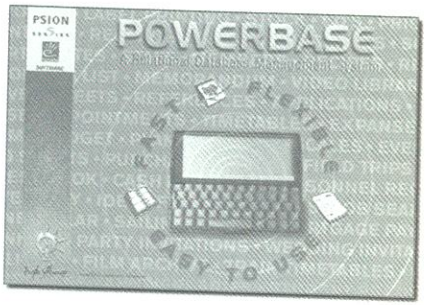
Microsoft cite Psion as threat

A recently-leaked Microsoft internal memo, penned by Bill Gates himself, reveals that he named Psion as Microsoft's "Number one global threat" over the next five years. His concern no doubt stems from the recent formation of Symbian, bringing Psion Software together with telecommunications giants Ericsson, Nokia and Motorola.

Purple database still delayed

Purple Software are still working on their ambitious *PowerBase* database product for the Series 5, and no firm release date is available at present. We expect to have at least a pre-release copy for review in the next issue of *Palmtop*.

Purple Software: 0171 3877777
www.purplesoft.com



Palmtop BV announce mass of free software upgrades

Dutch software company Palmtop BV have recently announced new, free upgrades to their Series 5 Route Planner, Collins Dictionaries, Expense Manager, Money and Halliwell's Movie and Video Guide programs:

- Version 1.4 of *Route Planner* (En Route) now allows direct editing of overlay icons and sports faster map drawing.
- Version 1.1 of the *Collins Dictionaries* now include a new menu option, similar to the anagram and crossword features in the Psion spelling checker, which will find every entry containing selected characters. It is also now possible to alter the amount of information about a keyword by tapping (or pressing [ENTER]) on it.

- Version 1.3 of *Money* offers a number of enhancements, including scheduling of transactions at arbitrary frequencies (e.g. 'every 17 weeks'), and allows creation of forecasts based on budgets, scheduled transactions or historic data.

- Version 1.1 of both Expense Manager and Halliwell's Movie and Video Guide feature bug fixes and minor enhancements.

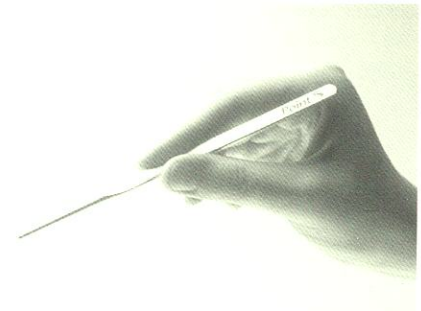
A special *Upgrader* utility is also available, scanning your Series 5 (or Geofox One) for relevant Palmtop BV applications and advising which ones need to be upgraded.

All of the above upgrades are available directly from Palmtop BV's own web site, and will appear on our CD-ROM from CD05 onwards.

www.palmtop.nl

Aluminium Series 5 pens

A number of alternative pens/styli have appeared for the Series 5, but the *Point5*, from Tantronics Ltd, is the first one to fit inside your machine just like Psion's own pen. The single piece aluminium Point5 is machined to exactly the same dimensions as the standard pen, but is more durable.

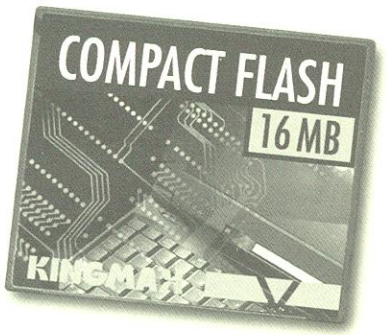


Scratching of the Series 5 screen with the metal tip is avoided by the use of a specially coated end, and the entire pen is anodised to give a more durable and electrically insulating finish.

The Point5 is priced at £9.95 plus VAT for single units, with reduced prices for multiple orders. Custom printing of logos can even be arranged for orders of 100 or more.

Readers with PC Internet access may like to note that the Point5 is a regular door prize on the 3-Lib Psion chat room each week. *(3lib.ukonline.co.uk/chatgate.htm)*

Contact Tantronics Ltd: 01625 260837
www.tantronics.u-net.com



Kingmax budget CFs

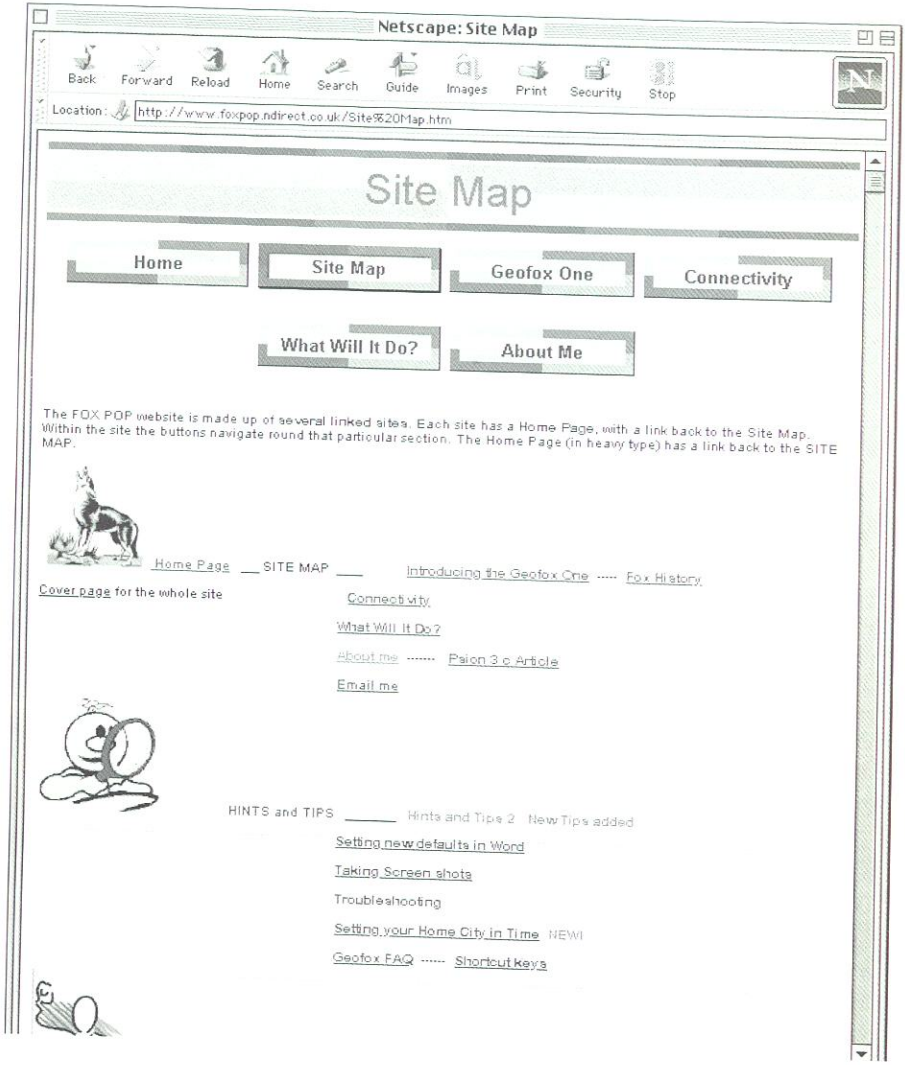
A new range of low-cost CompactFlash cards have been recently introduced by Exportech. Prices start at £27 (plus VAT) for a 4MB CF, rising to £115 (plus VAT) for the 32MB version.

The first 10 Palmtop readers to order a 24MB or 32MB card will get a FREE Compact Flash Adaptor and FREE postage included.

Exportech: 01202 422570
www.exportech.co.uk

Purple Software Series 5 demos now available

Purple Software are now offering downloadable demonstrations of all their Series 5 software products: currently *5Pack*, *Allegro*, *Backgammon/Chinese Chess*, *Chess* and *Navigator*. These fully working demonstrations are freely available from their web site on filling out an online registration form. The demos expire after 10-15 games or 30



'Foxpop'—the first independent web site for the Geofox One

days—enough time to get a good idea of whether you wish to purchase each product.

www.purplesoft.com

New web site for GeoFox One

Geofox One aficionados will be interested to hear of 'geoFOX POPulis', the first independent website dedicated to the machine.

Elisabeth Liddell, the creator of the site, says that the intention is "To complement, not compete with the existing excellent Psion 5 sites. Although new, FOXPOP is growing rapidly week by week. It has a core section about the firm, the Geofox One itself, EPOC Connect, and a What Will It Do? slot. There are other pages devoted to hints, tips and troubleshooting for the Geofox, as well as news, views and reviews and a separate section on third-party shareware and freeware."

www.foxpop.ndirect.co.uk

Bristol exhibition in December

The first major independent Psion-related exhibition in the UK will take place at the Aztec Hotel in Bristol on Sunday 13th December. Organised by Interconnex UK, the show will be attended by Psion Computers, Geofox Ltd and other Psion-related vendors, including Palmtop Publications. See the advertisement on page 118 for full details. Hopefully the entire *Palmtop* team will be there, so why not stop by and see us?

Series 5 Notepad in beta test

The long-awaited Series 5 version of Pelican Software's popular *Notepad* project manager software is currently in beta test, and we will be featuring a full review in the next issue of *Palmtop*. A time-limited copy of the latest pre-release version can be downloaded from Pelican Software's web site.

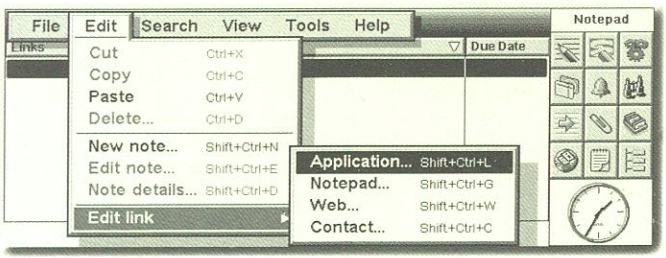
Pelican Software +1 281 242 8928
www.pelicansoft.com

Estuary guides for Series 5

Dublin-based Estuary Technologies have recently announced the launch of the first title in their forthcoming range of 'PDABOOK' Management Guides.

'The Management Guide to Negotiating', written by management guru Kate Keenan, and published originally in 60-page paperback form as part of the 'Pocket Manager' series by Ravette Publishing, is now available as a data file that can be loaded directly into a Series 5.

The 'PDABOOKS' are priced at £3.50 ($6) each, and orders can be emailed directly.



Coming soon—Notepad for the Series 5...

Estuary Technologies will eventually be publishing a further 13 titles in the series.

Estuary Technologies: +353 87 2341693
www.compulink.co.uk/~djoyce/

1999 Economist Diary Companion now available

On-Board Info's 1999 *Economist Diary Companion* should be available by the time you read this. See page 45 for a full review.

On-Board Info Ltd: 0171 370 0307
www.on-board-info.com

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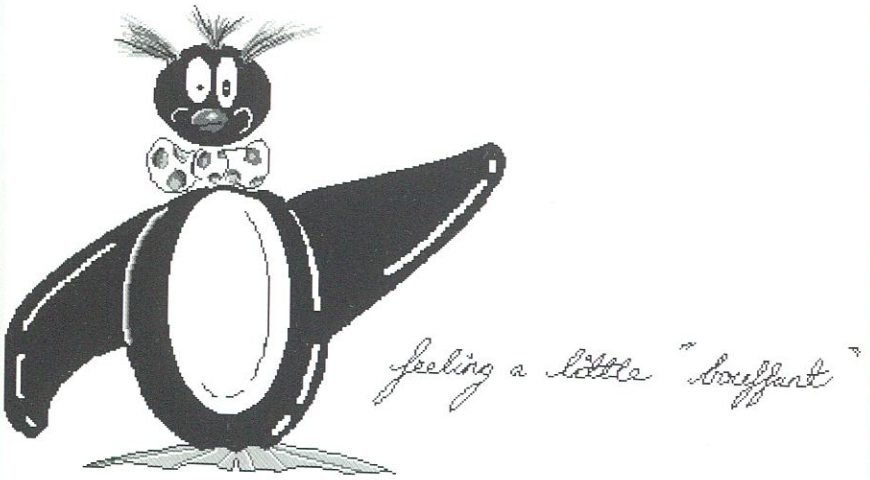
We will be updating the index shortly after publication of each issue of the magazine.

www.palmtop.co.uk

Psion ART

Original artwork created by Carl Reader using Series 5 SKETCH



INDUSTRY NEWS

In this new regular feature we devote a single page to what's happening in the non-Psion sector of the mobile computer world...

Although the non-Psion side of the handheld computer market has been fairly slow to develop, it appears to be getting somewhat crowded recently. The marketing strategies of Microsoft appear to be having some effect and since the birth of version 2.0 of Windows CE, there has been a proliferation of third party devices unleashed onto the market.

Three of the most notable recent releases supporting the Windows CE platform are the *NEC MobilePro 750C*, the *Hitachi HPW-200EC* and the *LG Phenom Ultra*—all handheld computers with 256 colour touch-screen displays and large touch-typeable keyboards. All have high specifications (and suitably high prices) and come equipped with the features and 'Pocket' applications synonymous with Windows CE 2.0. LG Electronics have also recently announced details of the forthcoming *Phenom Express*, rumoured to have a 12 hour battery life.

Hewlett Packard have released the successor to the popular *HP620LX*. The impressively specified *HP 660LX* boasts a 640x240 backlit colour screen, 32MB RAM and a 56K modem as standard. Two other recent additions to the handheld computer market are the *Compaq C Series Colour* and the *Philips Velo 500*, the long-awaited upgrade to the *Velo 1*.

Moving on to news from the Palm-size PC arena, the popularity of 3Com's *PalmPilot* seems to be under threat from a diversity of manufacturers. American PC suppliers Everex have entered the PDA market with the *Everex Freestyle*. Three models are currently available: the *Everex Freestyle Manager*, the *Associate* and the *Executive*. Casio, who also entered the palm market with its *Cassiopeia E-10 Palm-sized PC*, have now released an updated model, the *E-11*.

The popularity of the *PalmPilot* looks set to be challenged by the forthcoming *DaVinci*. Royal Consumer Business Products, the company behind the *DaVinci*, have announced that their latest handheld personal organiser will retail for about a third of the price of the *PalmPilot*. The *DaVinci Pro* will offer Internet, email and fax utilities as well as a host of other accessories, including an optional plug-in folding palm-sized keyboard.

For those who prefer the classy look, the *Philips Nino 300* may be the preferred choice. The *Nino 300* is another PDA powered by Windows CE. This device has attracted a lot of attention since its first public viewing in March of this year, primarily due to its unique metallic styling.

Microsoft have just announced details of Windows CE *Handheld PC Professional Edition*, version 3.0. The update has been designed to act as an extension to the Windows 95/98 operating systems found on desktop PCs and notebook computers. Pledged support for the new operating system has come from several companies.

Andy Nott

Estuary Technologies will eventually be publishing a further 13 titles in the series.

Estuary Technologies: +353 87 2341693
www.compulink.co.uk/~djoyce/

1999 Economist Diary Companion now available

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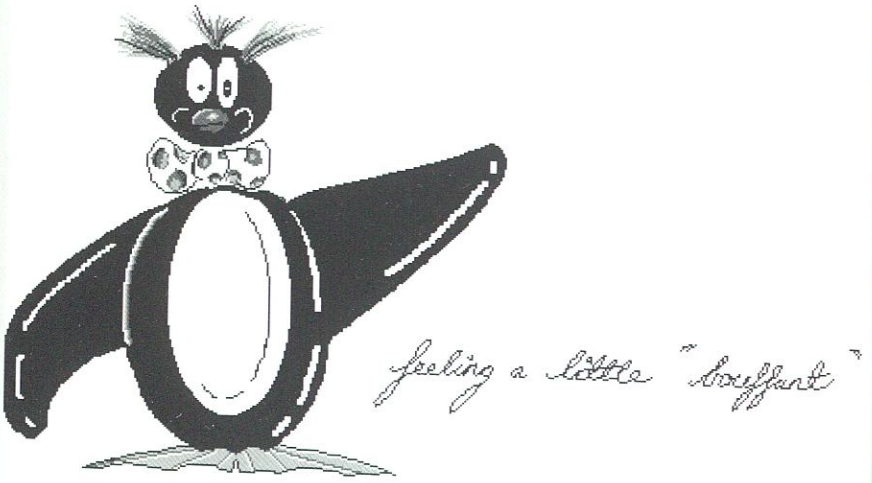

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Although the non-Psion side of the handheld computer market has been fairly slow to develop, it appears to be getting somewhat crowded recently. The marketing strategies of Microsoft appear to be having some effect and since the birth of version 2.0 of Windows CE, there has been a proliferation of third party devices unleashed onto the market.

Three of the most notable recent releases supporting the Windows CE platform are the *NEC MobilePro 750C*, the *Hitachi HPW-200EC* and the *LG Phenom Ultra*—all handheld computers with 256 colour touch-screen displays and large touch-typeable keyboards. All have high specifications (and suitably high prices) and come equipped with the features and 'Pocket' applications synonymous with Windows CE 2.0. LG Electronics have also recently announced details of the forthcoming *Phenom Express*, rumoured to have a 12 hour battery life.

Hewlett Packard have released the successor to the popular *HP620LX*. The impressively specified *HP 660LX* boasts a 640x240 backlit colour screen, 32MB RAM and a 56K modem as standard. Two other recent additions to the handheld computer market are the *Compaq C Series Colour* and the *Philips Velo 500*, the long-awaited upgrade to the *Velo 1*.

Moving on to news from the Palm-size PC arena, the popularity of 3Com's *PalmPilot* seems to be under threat from a diversity of manufacturers. American PC suppliers Everex have entered the PDA market with the *Everex Freestyle*. Three models are currently available: the *Everex Freestyle Manager*, the *Associate* and the *Executive*. Casio, who also entered the palm market with its *Cassiopeia E-10 Palm-sized PC*, have now released an updated model, the *E-11*.

The popularity of the *PalmPilot* looks set to be challenged by the forthcoming *DaVinci*. Royal Consumer Business Products, the company behind the *DaVinci*, have announced that their latest handheld personal organiser will retail for about a third of the price of the *PalmPilot*. The *DaVinci Pro* will offer Internet, email and fax utilities as well as a host of other accessories, including an optional plug-in folding palm-sized keyboard.

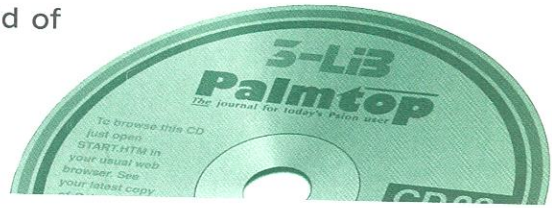
For those who prefer the classy look, the *Philips Nino 300* may be the preferred choice. The *Nino 300* is another PDA powered by Windows CE. This device has attracted a lot of attention since its first public viewing in March of this year, primarily due to its unique metallic styling.

Microsoft have just announced details of Windows CE *Handheld PC Professional Edition*, version 3.0. The update has been designed to act as an extension to the Windows 95/98 operating systems found on desktop PCs and notebook computers. Pledged support for the new operating system has come from several companies.

Andy Nott

Shareware Shorts

Steve Litchfield takes a look at the latest additions to the world of Psion shareware...


S-LiB
Palmtop
The journal for today's Psion user
To browse this CD just open START.HTM in your usual web browser. See your latest copy

A fervent plea

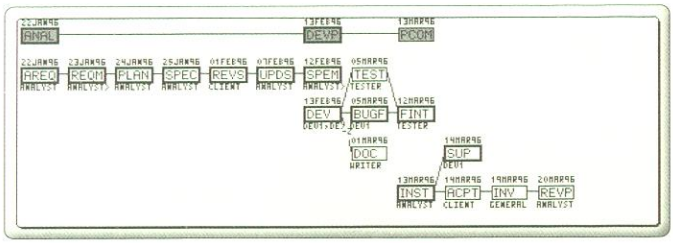
Most readers will be well aware that the shareware scene has been a vital part of the Psion success story. With well over two thousand separate programs available, there's (almost literally) an application to do just about everything. However, two large black clouds hang overhead and threaten to sour the scene.

Firstly, there's a worrying trend towards programs which are crippled, with authors being paranoid about the possibility of users not paying up. Although I sympathise with their aims, authors should stop to consider for a moment how people are expected to grow to love and rely on their masterpiece if it was angrily deleted five minutes after installation because it was found to be crippled or limited in some major fashion. The best way to encourage someone to part with their hard-earned money is to *trust them* and make your program so wonderful that they fall over themselves in eagerness to reward you. This *does* happen—just ask Alan Richey, Andy Clarkson or myself for examples!

Which brings me to the second problem and another plea, this time to you the user. If you enjoy a program and find it useful, *please* register with the author. By rewarding the authors of well written and fully working shareware, you stand a better chance of seeing more of the same flowing from their fingers. Play fair with shareware.

SIBO goes marching on

The 3mx will hopefully provide extra motivation for shareware authors not to abandon the 16-bit range. A lesson I've tried to take on board myself, with the release of version 6.0 of *Psi-Mapper/GB* for the 3a/3c/3mx (available from CD05 onwards in `\library\mapping`). The major changes from the well-known v5.0 are that all the town plans are now in a single database (speeding backups and saving space) and that many overlays have been added, updated or removed. Installation is now easier as well, with only one ZIP file to consider rather than (up to) a dozen or so. *Psi-Mapper/GB*'s great rival in the battle to be the most-registered shareware program ever is **Alan Richey**'s *S3aBank*, also now given a facelift for new 3mx users in the form of *RMRBank* (CD05 onwards in `\library\money`). Both applications were always reckoned to be in need of an extra



Plan for the Series 3, showing off a PERT chart

turn of speed and the 3mx's arrival is welcomed by both of us.

The third member of the all-time SIBO top-three, **Andy Clarkson**'s *Plan*, has also been updated, to version 4.6 (CD04 onwards in `\library\misc`). The latest upgrade to this popular project management system includes a number of bug fixes and new registration details.

Getting away from it all

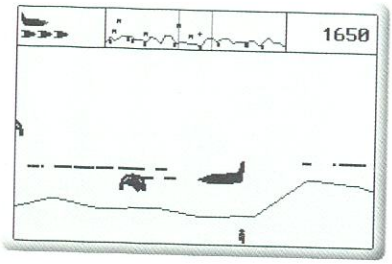
If you've ever sat in a seaside hotel and wished there was a way of working out whether the tide was going to be in when you got to the sea, **Jean-Yves Pontailler** has the answer, with his *Tide 98* (CD02 onwards in `\library\vault`). The program calculates the tide height for any coast in western Europe and displays it continuously. You just have to enter the tide height and time once and the program will do the rest. The utility also logs GPS coordinates if you plug in a suitable unit. Jean-Yves also recommends the shareware *Ocean* (CD02 onwards in `\library\vault`), by **Pierre Pellot**, a more specialised utility that offers even more reliable predictions of the tide times using a harmonic constants model.

All work and no play would make Series 3 users very dull people and there's a couple of upgrades worth looking out for. **Chris Kessell**'s *Boggly* has been updated to v1.5 (CD05 onwards in `\library\games`) and is an excellent test of quick thinking and vocabulary. *Boggly* is a one player simulation of Parker Brothers' classic dice game 'Boggle', in which the aim is to find as many words as possible in a 4x4 grid of random letters within a certain time. Each word must be formed from a series of adjacent letters in the grid.

Another old favourite has been updated, **Richard Smedley** has released version 2.0 of his shareware *Snake* (CD04 onwards in `\library\games`). You control the snake, eating tasty beetles and avoiding the deadly mushrooms. Every time you eat a beetle the snake grows slightly longer, making it more and more difficult to avoid eating your own tail. Features of version 2.0 include three difficulty settings, numerous bonus objects, and a secret silliness mode.

Siena software

The Siena is not known for its audio capabilities, but **Jeremy Smith** has found a way of making it squawk its way through standard MIDI sound files. The resulting bleeps and trills are entertaining, if not very useful, and *MIDI player* (CD05 onwards in `\library\vault`) is freeware. Also for the Siena but on a more serious note is *CaseTime* (CD05 onwards in `\library\siena`) by **Michael Brewer**, which is a simple and compact multiple timer application, providing timers



Siender in quick-fire action

for use in keeping track of time spent on several concurrent tasks.

I gave a rave review to the shareware game *De3ender* in issue 18 and now Siena owners can share the fun with *Siender* (CD05 onwards in `\library\siena`), **Mark Wheadon**'s incredibly fast Defender-clone, in which you speed through an alien landscape, dodging baddies and rescuing humans.

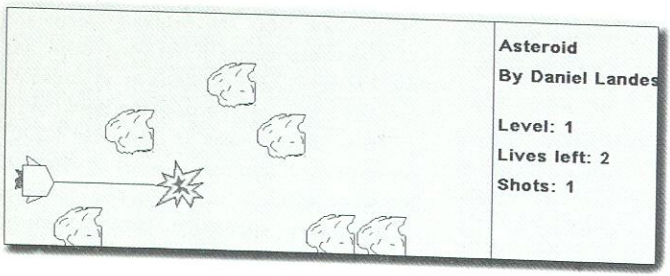
The prolific **Graham Parks** has been busy again. *Sheep Extras* 1.11 (CD05 onwards in `\library\siena`) is shareware for the Siena and is really a collection of small applications in a single file, including file manager, picture viewer, graphical battery monitor, stopwatch, countdown timer and a few games.

Mentioned in issue 19's Newsreel, **Artamedia**'s *Psi Soccer Manager 98* is now available for both Series 3 (CD04 onwards in `\library\games`) and Series 5 (CD05 onwards in `\library\s5games`) in the form of a three-match shareware demo. The game is extremely absorbing if you've any interest in football, and features animated matchplay (complete with commentary and crowd cheers) and all the usual management decisions and quandaries. We'll be including a full review of *Psi Soccer Manager 98* in issue 21.

And so to the 5...

As you might expect, the Series 5 software scene continues at a frantic pace. There's not enough space to give an exhaustive list of what's new, but here are some highlights.

Daniel Landes has been very busy, with half-a-dozen new programs, including *Asteroids*, a to-do manager and *All-in-One Utilities*, a *JWIN* clone (calculations, unit conversions, etc.) *All-in-One* (CD05 onwards in `\library\s5util`) also features a graphical jotter for saving doodles, in the same vein as *PenPad* and *Scribble* (mentioned in the last issue). Daniel's *Asteroids* game (CD04 onwards in `\library\s5games`) isn't a clone of the popular arcade game (as you'd expect) but rather a linear shoot-em-up.



Shooting Asteroids in a barrel...

The EPOC world continues to be bombarded with utilities which offer new ways to quickly navigate between documents and applications. **Graham Crichton**'s *Shortcut Wizard* (CD03 onwards in `\library\s5util`) is one such and mimics the shortcut function found in Windows 95. It incorporates itself as part of the system screen, with shortcut documents that simply point EPOC towards the file or program that you set up for the shortcut. In similar vein, but taking the concept much further, is **Jason Kneen**'s *ExtraBars* (CD05 onwards in `\library\s5util`), in which the shortcuts are presented as new 'Extras' bars (hence the name). ExtraBars is discussed in detail on page 48.

A time for everything

You'll remember **Pascal Nicholas**'s *Macro5* freeware that scooped the honours in issue 18's macro system roundup? Well, there's now a companion utility in *CronTab* (CD05 onwards in `\library\s5util`), which offers the ability to launch macros and programs at any hour of the day or night.

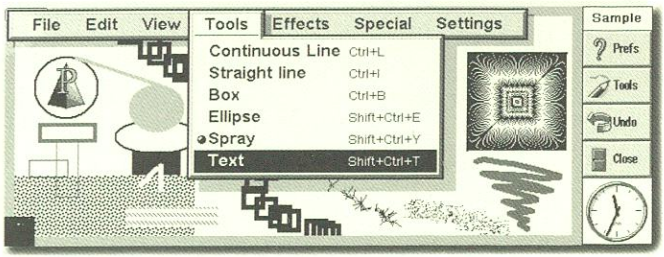
Staying with freeware, **Philipp Salvisberg** has released *Crypto* (CD05 onwards in `\library\s5util`), a file encryption tool that offers a free means to protect databases and other important documents by totally scrambling their contents.

The recent release of several powerful OPX extensions (see **John McAleely**'s web site for full details) has meant that OPL/32 authors have found a new lease of life, with some surprisingly powerful utilities. **Colin Shearing**'s *Jotpad* (CD04 onwards in `\library\s5util`) is a good example, allowing entry and modification of AGENDA entries directly from the System screen.

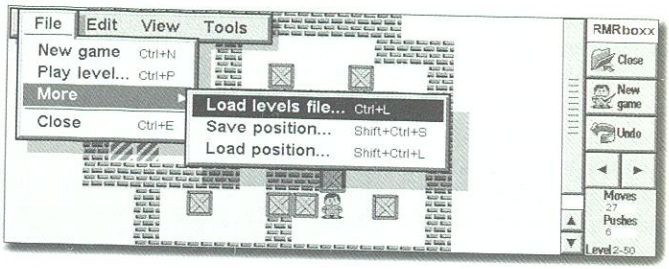
Malcolm Bryant's *ABP*, the freeware banking program, is now up to v4.01 (CD05 onwards in `\library\s5money`) and is considerably more capable than the version reviewed back in issue 17. Worth taking a look at. **Guillaume Dupont**'s share-management opus, *Porfolio*, is also now considerably upgraded, at version 5.3.c (CD05 onwards in `\library\s5money`), with more functions and better speed throughout.

Researching your family tree

Genealogy is seemingly a perennial favourite among *Palmtop* readers, many of whom will welcome the arrival of **Andy Clark**'s *AGeneDB* (CD05 onwards, in `\library\s5misc`). It's a genealogical database which allows you to view and record details about your family tree whilst on the move (in libraries, records departments, etc.) *AGeneDB* can swap data with applications on the PC that can accept genealogical databases in GedCom format.



The brand new RMR Art



Classic brain-mangling action in the puzzle RMRBoxx

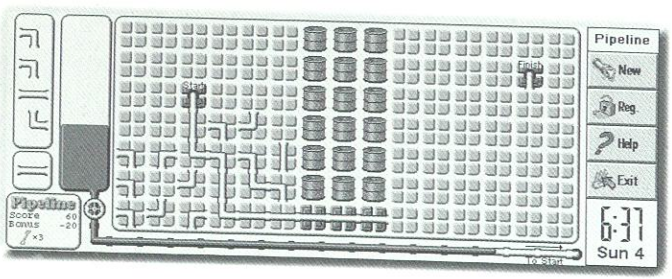
RMR rules, OK?

New Series 5 releases from **Alan Richey**'s **RMR Software** include *RMRArt* (CD04 onwards in `\library\s5graphics`), an improvement on the built-in SKETCH application and *RMRFile* (CD05 onwards in `\library\s5util`), a graphical file manager with drag-and-drop facilities between two browser windows. Also planned from RMR but long overdue is their *FTP manager* (for uploading Internet files), the absence of which is the reason why we haven't been able to publish our 'Maintaining a web site on your Series 5' guide yet.

End games

By far the most notable leisure release for EPOC in the last 2 months has been the freeware *PocketChess* (CD05 onwards in `\library\s5games`), by **Scott Ludwig** and **Fred Bouvry**. Despite being totally free, it contains a professional chess engine that plays a strong game. We'll be featuring a full review of Pocketchess in the next issue.

Close on PocketChess's heels are *Pipeline* and *Mis5ile Defense* (by **BeeSoft** and **Palmtime** respectively, both CD05 onwards in `\library\s5games`). *Pipeline* is based on the old Pipemania classic puzzle, but rather than just extending a pipe to a certain length, you now have to battle your way around obstacles and towards a specified finishing point. The unregistered version allows you to play the first 10 of 50 very challenging levels. *Mis5ile Defense* is also impressive, a simplified version of the 1980s coin-op classic in which the Series 5's touch screen is used to its utmost in launching missiles at incoming invaders. The graphics and gameplay in both games are exceptional—excellent vehicles for the power of EPOC and the OPL/32 development environment.



***Pipeline* —great graphics and addictive gameplay**

What is shareware?

Written by professional programmers and enthusiasts to meet specific (and sometimes unusual) needs, shareware is often supplied for use on a thirty day trial basis. If you like the software you are then asked to send a payment to the author. Some programs are freeware and don't require any payment at all. Each program comes complete with information about how to install and use it, and how to pay for it.

Where can I find it?

One way to get any of these programs is from the Internet. If you've got access to the web there are several on-line indices which link directly to the relevant author download page concerned. Most mainstream programs (excluding games) appear in the comprehensive Palmtop Software Directory on our web site. This is principally an online listing of popular applications available for all Psion palmtops (a paper version is often included right here at the end of an issue). The version on our web site is the best place to start, as each entry has a hyperlink directly to the program author. If you're trying to track down a game use the special Games directory at the back of this issue.

Things are actually even easier if you haven't got Internet access. As long as the program concerned has been out for a month or so, you should find a copy on the latest edition of the Palmtop CD-ROM, indexed into the appropriate category. To help you track each item down, from now on we'll quote the folder (directory) name where it's located, as well as the earliest CD number to incorporate the program in question.

How do I use it?

Once you've found the file you want, there are three steps to take:

1. Decompress the files. If you're new to computers you may not be familiar with compression. Psion applications normally have more than one component (e.g. the program itself, help files and pictures). These are normally compressed into one file, which makes them easier to distribute. Shareware is most commonly compressed in 'Zip' format, and you can recognise these by the '.ZIP' at the end of the filename. Before you can install and run the program, you need to extract these files with an 'unzip' program, which is freely available from your shareware supplier. If you use DOS, look for PKUNZIP, Windows users can use Winzip, and Mac users should try ZipIt or the commercial Stuffit Deluxe. You can also unzip files on your Psion without using another computer, using either PsiZip (Series 3a/3c, Siena and Series 5) or S5Zip for the Series 5.

2. Copy the files. You'll probably now need to transfer the unzipped files onto your Psion. To do this you'll need some external hardware, such as the PsiWin link or a Cyclone drive. Normally, one of the unzipped software files is a text file (e.g. README.TXT), which can be read in any word processor. It explains how the program should be installed and where the files need to be copied to on your Psion.

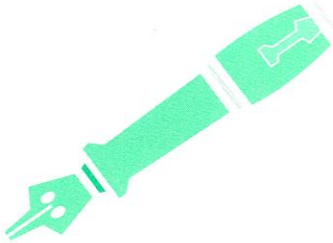
   See 'The Installation Game' in issues 14 and 15 for a more comprehensive discussion of the above procedures.

3. Install the application. From your 3/3a/3c/3mx or Siena system screen, select [Psion]-[I]. If the program was copied correctly, the filename should appear in the list. Select it, press [Enter], and the icon should be installed, ready to run. Series 5 users don't need to do this, as the newly installed program will automatically appear on the Extras bar.

Readers' Letters

Contribute & WIN PRIZES!

The Prize Letter in each issue wins the author a FREE software package or other Psion goodies from our special collection. Prizes are valued at up to £70 each!



Prize Letter

More Series 5 woes...

I couldn't agree more with Kristian Nielsen's letter in issue 19—I'm also a dedicated Psion follower and user. I started with a Psion handheld way back, moved to a 3a, then 3c, and now the Series 5. All of the models except the Series 5 have been sturdy and long-lasting.

I have had my '5' since a few months after the launch and now I find that it is 'self-destructing'. The paint is peeling, the pointer/pen is now stuck in its hole, the CF slot is causing fitting problems, with cards having to be 'wiggled' to work, the hinges are slowly breaking away and the case is cracked around the front LEDs.

I have had a leather case for my Series 5 since I bought it and it is always kept on a desk stand or in my case/pocket.

How can Psion produce such a great product in an innovative design with such poor quality?

What do Psion say about this?

Mark Robson
Bracknell, Berkshire

...And Psion reply

We are sorry to hear that you have suffered quality problems with your Series 5. Psion has an above average quality record within the industry and maintains a low failure rate on its products.

Your particular experiences are extraordinary and are separate faults which have occurred together, rather than being somehow related to one another.

Psion are happy to repair the Series 5 under normal warranty terms, so please contact Psion's Service Centre or your retailer to resolve these problems.

Psion Press Office

...And we reply back

We certainly hear of quite a few Series 5 hardware problems via our readers, though we obviously never hear a word from all those people who have no problems at all.

Peeling paint seems to be one of the biggest recurring problems, and we have heard many complaints from readers. I purchased a new Series 5 myself a few weeks ago (after the pre-release machine that Psion kindly gave to me at the Series 5 press launch back in July 1997 finally gave up the ghost, by refusing to accept pen input). I was horrified to find that within FIVE DAYS the casing was showing blemishes where the paint finish was beginning to peel!

Good as the Series 5 machines are, consumers are *not* willing to pay hundreds of pounds for a computer that looks shabby within a matter of weeks or (in my case) *days*. The whole prospect of building a product with a perfectly durable finish (i.e. the plain moulded plastic used for the casing itself) and then coating it with a paint finish that rubs off with only light use is absurd. On our visit to the Psion factory earlier this year (see issue 14) we were assured that this quality problem had been resolved—clearly not the case.

On further probing, it appears that the water-based paint finish on existing Series 5s was chosen to comply with an impending EC directive, due to be enforced shortly after the Series 5 was released. The proposed directive was later abandoned, allegedly due to intense pressure from the automobile industry, leaving Psion with an unnecessarily fragile paint finish.

Psion will shortly be releasing a 'Special Edition' Series 5 with a solvent-based metallic paint finish, and will be moving to solvent-based paints for the mainstream Series 5 models shortly afterwards - Ed.

Off to the land of mx...

I'm afraid it's finally happened. After a peeling case, stuck and broken pens, a ROM that desperately needs an overhaul (and hasn't appeared as promised), eight hours battery life at best [in my experience], and a screen so reflective you could use it as a shaving mirror, I've given up on Psion's Series 5. Instead I've found a palmtop that really *does* do everything I need.

I've got a fully featured word processor with outlining—not that I write long pieces that often on a palmtop. Superb PC connectivity means I can do formatting on my PC anyway before I print out. The spreadsheet is first-rate and I can sort in it. I didn't realise how much I'd missed that feature for the last eight months! The diary program seems even more customisable than the 5's and is really easy to use. The database is easily the 5's equal (unless you enjoy wasting memory with embedded sketches and sound files). In addition I have a notepad built in for those short notes, a superb file manager and the usual extras: calculator, alarms, world times, comms and a programming language. Add-on software is comprehensive and includes web browser and email, finance programs and a host of other apps, both commercial and shareware.

But where my new machine *really* excels is in these areas:

1) Battery life is 60 hours+ on 2 AAs—I'm no longer tied to a mains socket.

2) The screen is clear and highly readable (and can be backlit without that annoying buzz).

3) It's so light and easy to hold that when I first got it out of its box, I thought it was a dummy display unit packed by mistake!

Of course there's no touch sensitive screen and pen, but then I hardly used that anyway, and when you have a processor and O/S subjectively faster than the 5's and an RS232 port easily the 5's equal, then surely this machine has got to be the most desirable palmtop available, especially as it costs less than £270?

So thank you, Psion, for the 3mx, and for restoring my faith in you as the number one British computer company. I, for one, am happy to be back to the mature and seemingly bug-free environment of SIBO, which I mistakenly left last February, attracted by the lure of so-called 'leading-edge' (read 'not fully tested') technology.

Perhaps when EPOC is up to ROM version six or so, it will be worth trying to 'upgrade', but for now my advice to prospective buyers is "Get a 3mx while you can!"

Chris Rolinson
Walsall, West Midlands

More US advertising needed!

When I was looking for a PDA, I had narrowed the search down to the HP 360LX and possibly the (colour) HP 620LX. It was only an outstanding review of the Series 5 in PC magazine that made me pause to consider the Series 5, which I had not previously heard of and is relatively unknown here in the United States.

Once I actually saw a Series 5, I was impressed. How impressed? My glowing comments after several months use will probably persuade my brother who happens to live in Silicon Valley to buy a Series 5 too.

We would probably both be rated as 'power users' by most people. The one thing I've said that really caught his attention was the fact that the system has *never* locked up or crashed, no matter how many applications I have open at once. One can hardly say that of Windows computers! I think this is one of the outstanding characteristics Psion could exploit if they ever decide to advertise here in the USA.

Jim Roberts
Monroe, Wisconsin, USA

Len Baker strikes again!

Following his earlier appearance in Readers' Letters (issue 14), 'The Bard of Leicester' unleashes his latest work...

No matter what we think
About the Series 5
There's always someone out there
Who's never satisfied

Some moan about the paint
Some complain about small cracks
Some say of the internal ROM
Of functions that it lacks

In WORD there is no outline
And Jotter's missing too
In fact I'm sure there's lots of things
That Psion ought to do!

My home is now an advert
For Psion technology
A Siena and 3a are owned
along with my 3c

The Siena is my wife's new brain
In her bag it does reside
The 3a is my son's new toy
Shown to his friends with pride

Two daughters make my home complete
But Psions they have not yet
To make our home a perfect ad
Two more I have to get

Now kids can have the re-homed
Siena, 3a and c
My wife can have a new one but
It's what to get for me?

Not one to discriminate
on grounds of race or sex
I think the only answer is
To buy 'wife' an *mx*

So for me it's decided
A sacrifice I'll make
The model some refer to as
"Expensive paperweight"

So if you're one of those
Who are less than satisfied
There's someone here who'd love to have
A PSION SERIES 5

Len Baker
Leicester

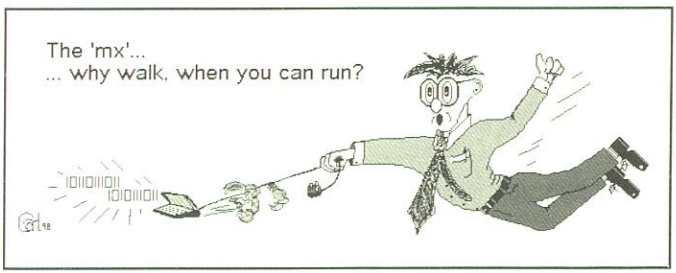
Life's a Pstruggle

I should have realised that moving to the other pside of the world might cause pserious problems.

I have a Series 5, one of the very first produced, with which I have been more than delighted—and I even managed to get it updated to ROM 1.01 and my mains adaptor changed by Psion before I left for Australia. I really needed the latest version of PsiWin, but was not prepared to spend an hour or so downloading it. On enquiring to Psion I was told that it was to be available on CD in April. When we left at the beginning of April it was still not available, and after many hours of chasing by my relatives in the UK (who were told by Psion that it was not being generally released) they eventually relented (after over an hour on the phone), only to send it to an address in the UK! It seems that overseas support from Psion is non-existent—I made several enquiries to Psion via email and to the delegated overseas contact for this area. Psion say they will forward the message, but that I am NOT to contact them for technical support. I am still awaiting replies from the overseas support people.

I have yet to see another Series 5 over here in Australia, just the odd 3a and 3c. With such a wonderful product what on earth are Psion doing about looking after their existing customers and the potential wealth of new customers that exist here?

Tony Harman
Sydney, AUSTRALIA



A piece of original artwork created by Carl Reader using SKETCH on his Series 5

A Closer Look...

...at some of the newest and most interesting products available for your Series 3 or Series 5/Geofox One

Psion Series 3mx

Repackaging the Series 3c in 1998 may seem like a strange move. In the age of touch screens, RISC processors and embedded objects, hasn't the Series 3 concept finally

reached its sell-by date? Think again. What PIM functions is the Series 3 missing? None—at least none to speak of. What add-on software packages are available for it? Answer: just about everything imaginable—from the common to the obscure.

What were the limitations of the machine? Okay, so the keyboard could be better, but plenty of people still achieved unfeasibly high typing speeds, many using the now-famous 'two thumbs' technique. In any case, it's debatable whether a significantly better keyboard could be squeezed into the existing form factor. The machine sometimes felt a little sluggish though, particularly when navigating the directory tree, searching big databases or running some of the more sophisticated third-party applications.

The Series 3c, released in 1996, addressed many of the more common criticisms of the Series 3a: slow RS232 port speed, the lack of a 'month-at-a-view' facility in AGENDA, a list view in DATA, a simple note-taking application (JOTTER), a 'proper' file manager, and, eventually, a screen backlight. There's no doubt that the Series 3c, itself a disappointment to many long-standing Psion users who had been hoping for a *completely* new machine some three years after the release of the 3a, fixed many of the 3a's foibles.

The 3mx bears but *three* significant changes from the Series 3c: a 28Mhz processor (three times the speed of the 3a/3c), a 115Kbps RS232 port (twice the speed of the 3c, six times that of the 3a), and a gunmetal-grey metallic paint finish in place of the 3c's rubber-effect. We've had a 3mx here on test

A worthwhile upgrade?

So is the 3mx a worthwhile upgrade for existing users?

Series 3 Classic users

For the few *Palmtop* readers still using an original Series 3, the 3mx represents a vast step forwards while still maintaining a familiar interface and full SSD compatibility. Now may be the time to put that six year old machine into retirement...

256/512K/1MB Series 3a users

For anyone with a 256K or 512K Series 3a, the 3mx offers all the software enhancements of the Series 3c, together with the extra speed, memory and a backlit screen. If your existing 3a is bursting at the seams then the mx will give you much more room to grow.

2MB Series 3a users

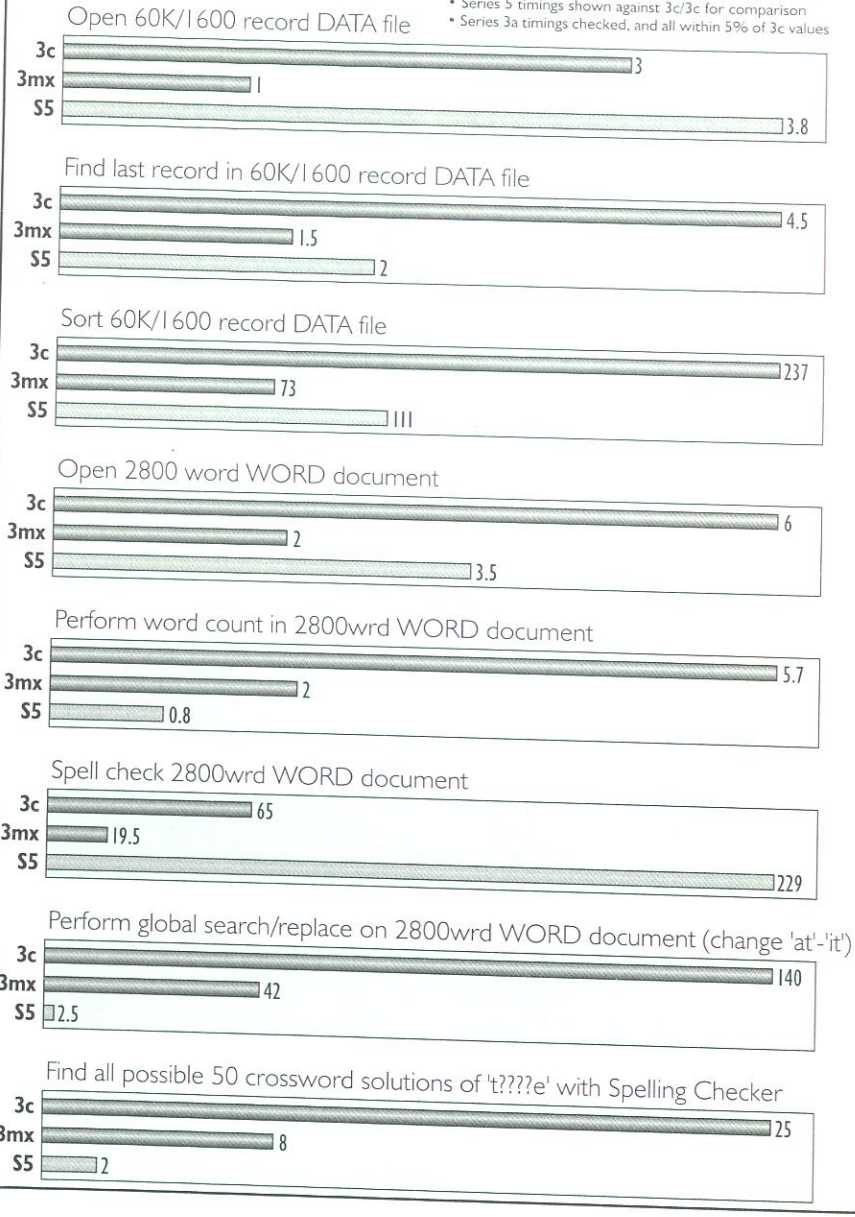
As per Series 3a users above, but of course with no memory incentive.

Series 3c users

Processor and communication speed are the only issues here, apart from the added backlight if you have an earlier model of 3c. Although many Series 3c users will eventually aspire to a Series 5, a 3mx will remove the learning curve required when moving to a '5', and preserve any existing investment in Series 3 software and accessories. If you're a Series 3 power user who's basically happy with your existing machine, but feel the need for an extra turn of speed then the mx is most certainly *the* machine for you.

Series 3mx benchmark tests

- All times measured in seconds, shorter bars are better
- Series 5 timings shown against 3c/3c for comparison
- Series 3a timings checked, and all within 5% of 3c values



Strangely the 'info' menu shows 'About 3c' instead of 'mx' but brings up this splash screen...

since the end of July, though were forbidden to report on it (under the terms of Psion's non-disclosure agreement) until after the machine was released in early September. In the three months or so that I've been using an mx the paint finish has thankfully proved completely durable, with no evidence of peeling or rubbing off.

The 3mx is only available in one configuration, backlit with 2MB of internal memory. Series 3c production has now been stopped, leaving the mx as the sole model in the Series 3 range. It is noteworthy that the 3mx is *not* currently planned for release in the USA, a marketing decision by Psion.

The lack of any changes to the built-in software make it clear that this will be the last of the Series 3 family. Given the success of the range over the past seven years the marketing department obviously decided that there was still enough life left in the product to warrant the relatively low development costs associating with tripling the clock speed, but not enough to revamp the built-in ROM or make any other major changes.

Given the maturity of the software applications I have to agree with their decision: it ensures (almost) 100% compatibility with the vast library of 3a/3c software already available and avoids the inevitable risk of bugs creeping in, unavoidable whenever software is updated. The only known incompatibility of the 3mx is with Psion's *SMS Manager* software (which relies on the 56K RS232 port speed of the 3c).

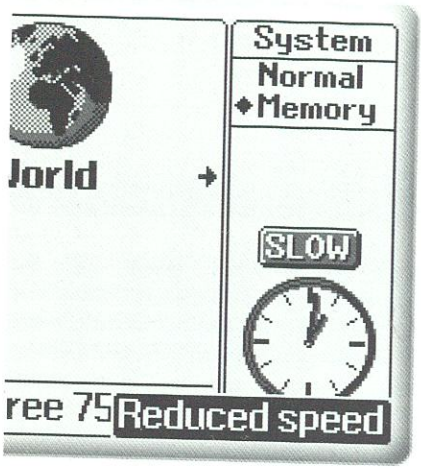
The Series 3mx is a pleasure to operate. There has always been that *special* appeal of the Series 3 range, and the mx just takes the original attraction and packages it into a blindingly fast little computer. Make no mistake, the mx feels faster than a Series 5 in many operations, not just when compared with the 3a or 3c. Menus pop up in a fraction of a second, as does the file selector and all the built-in applications. With most operations the response of the mx feels almost instantaneous, and the satisfaction this adds to the machine's use is immeasurable.

In use, everything is almost exactly three times faster than the 3a/3c. This is just what's needed for the majority of applications, but

Interpreting benchmarks

The benchmarks opposite show that the Series 3mx is indeed almost *exactly* three times faster than the Series 3a/3c in most operations.

More telling, perhaps, are the Series 5 figures, which show the 3mx to be surprisingly faster in several areas: file opening, database searching and sorting, and particularly spell checking, where the Series 5's algorithm is clearly flawed.



Slow when you need it—the mx in compatibility mode

would normally cause timing-critical software such as games to go, quite literally, berserk. Psion avoided this compatibility issue at a stroke by adding a hotkey combination [Control]-[Caps Lock] to toggle between normal (fast) speed and (slow) compatibility mode. Whenever slow speed is selected, the word 'SLOW' appears in the right-hand status bar, where the 'CAPS' icon normally comes up to show when 'Caps Lock' is on.

Despite the speed increase, battery life is unaffected. All of our benchmark tests showed power consumption to be essentially the same as a backlit 3c.

Connectivity is becoming increasingly important as computers evolve, and Psion have addressed this in part by doubling the RS232 port speed. In tandem with this, the new PsiWin 2.2, reviewed on the next page, has been expanded to work fully with the Series 3 range, bringing PC-connectivity into line with the Series 5.

The *big* disappointment on the communications front is that neither PsiWin nor the *PsiMail Internet* suite have been bundled with the mx, in my view a horrible missed opportunity to widen the appeal of the machine. This would have meant lost revenue on the stand-alone programs, but I firmly believe that users are no longer prepared to pay extra for what is, after all, an integral part of the package with most palmtops. Buying a 3mx complete with PC and Internet connectivity therefore still costs *more* than a Series 5, which has both products included at no extra cost. At £269.95 including VAT I feel that the 3mx is priced a little high anyway, and if you need to buy PsiWin and PsiMail Internet at the same time it becomes poor value for money.

Ignoring Psion's connectivity blunder, as a stand-alone palmtop computer the 3mx is a clear winner. There's no other machine with the same combination of software base, speed, portability and (now, with PsiWin 2.2) connectivity on the market at present. Anyone looking for a machine with enhanced diary functions (which is primarily where Psion are targeting the mx) will find the 3mx very capable, but most *Palmtop* readers know very well that the Series 3 is so much more than that.

Steve Clack

Psion Series 3mx

From: All Psion dealers (except USA)

Availability: now

Contact: n/a

Price: £269.95 inc. VAT

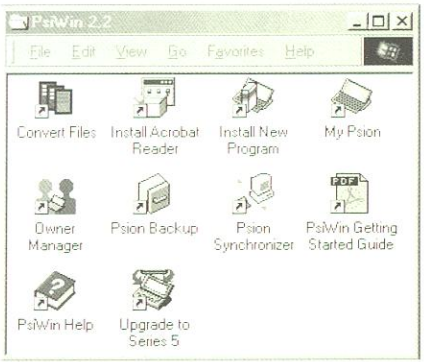
Quality:

Value:

PsiWin 2.2

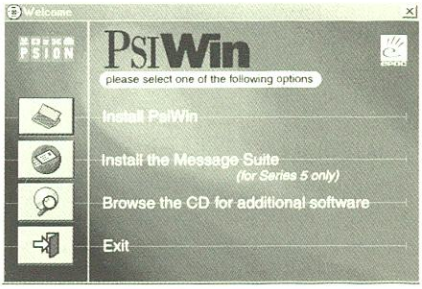
Series 3a/3c/3mx/Siena/Series 5

Around six months ago Psion released version 2.1 of PsiWin, which was essentially an update to the software supplied with new Series 5 machines. Until now, PsiWin has been available free of charge, but that's now changed, mainly as a result of the release of the Series 3mx. Psion's press release states that "PsiWin 2.2 is faster, more flexible, and makes your Psion palmtop compatible with more PC software."

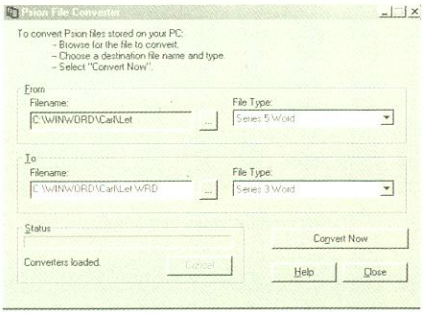


Series 3 and Siena users no longer have to make do with 'Psion Manager'. The latest version of PsiWin has full support for Series 3a, 3c, 3mx and Siena machines, as well as the Series 5. It's now possible to transfer WORD and SHEET files (in both directions) between Series 3a/3c/3mx/Siena models and the Series 5. There is still no convertor to allow Series 5 AGENDA or DATA files to be read on a Series 3 family machine, although the 'upgrade to 5' convertor is still supplied.

Although SKETCH files can be converted to BMP format, I was hoping to see improvements to image conversion. There is still no

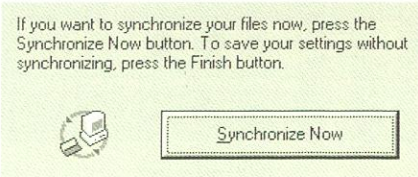


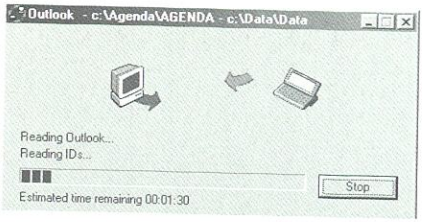
convertor for GIF or JPG, and still no built-in convertor to allow Psion PIC files to be converted to BMP files, although this can be done by Psion's DOS program BMCONV.



WORD, from a 5 to a 3 at last!

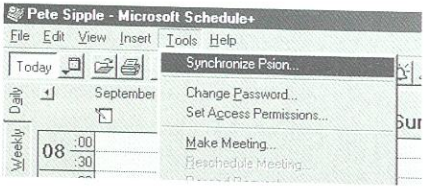
Psion boasts that PsiWin 2.2's synchronization is faster, more powerful, and easier to use. It would seem that much work has been done to improve its ability to exchange data reliably between Psion and PC. The following changes have been made:


If you want to synchronize your files now, press the Synchronize Now button. To save your settings without synchronizing, press the Finish button.
Synchronize Now



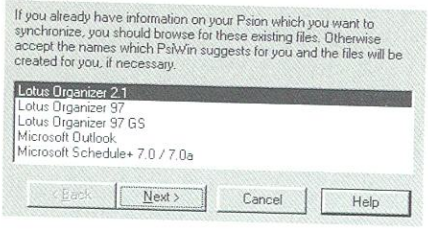
Merging with Outlook

- Support for synchronization with Microsoft Outlook 98, Schedule+7.5, Lotus Organizer 97 GS and Lotus Organizer Premium Edition (v4.1 only available in North America).



Starting synchronization from Schedule+

- It's now possible to start synchronization from within Schedule+ or Outlook.
- A new Synchronization Wizard makes it easier to set up new synchronization tasks including contacts template files for DATA and AGENDA, designed to match the fields of popular PC contact manager applications.

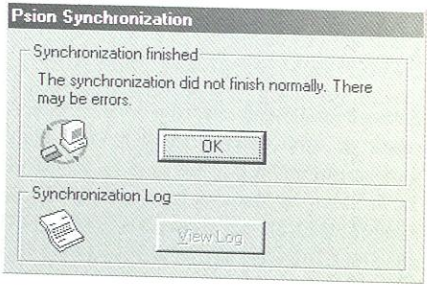

If you already have information on your Psion which you want to synchronize, you should browse for these existing files. Otherwise accept the names which PsiWin suggests for you and the files will be created for you, if necessary.
Lotus Organizer 2.1
Lotus Organizer 97
Lotus Organizer 97 GS
Microsoft Outlook
Microsoft Schedule+ 7.0 / 7.0a
< Back
Next >
Cancel
Help

The Wizard at work

- Up to 16 fields are now supported in contact synchronization, including AGENDA note fields, Contacts/Data Notes and a second office number.

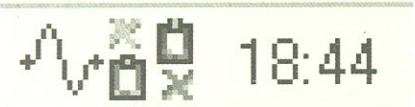
One of ways that Psion have been able to achieve faster, reliable synching with Outlook is the use of unique IDs for contacts. When you first sync with Outlook98, you'll find that a new field appears in your DATA file, labelled 'UID'. This is the index key that identifies the equivalent records in Outlook.

My first synchronization with Outlook '97 worked—eventually. The Wizard guided me through setting up which fields should be associated during the merge. The software did some handshaking for a few seconds and then set to work. My first attempt failed, and gave no clue why. I was slightly disappointed that the error message wasn't at all helpful and no error log was generated. My problem was somewhere at the Outlook end, and when I resolved that and tried again, all went well.



Problems...

The new 'CopyAnywhere' feature allows you to copy and paste text between a PC and your Series 5. This nifty little feature works well and is very handy. For example, if you have a paragraph on your PC's word processor that you want to add to, say,

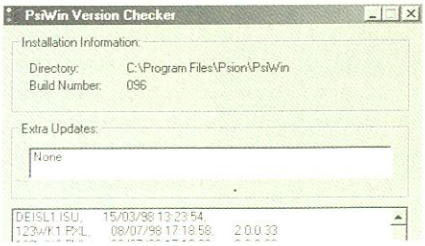


The CopyAnywhere icon concealed on your toolbar

WORD on your Psion, just highlight the text on your PC and copy it to the clipboard. If CopyAnywhere is running and your Psion is connected, the Psion 'beeps'. Pressing [Ctrl]-[v] on your palmtop then inserts the text. It works both ways—your PC beeps or plays a sound file when the Psion copies or cuts text. This impressive feature is only available on the Series 5.

The CD not only contains the PsiWin software, but a few other goodies as well. The manual is supplied on the disk in Adobe Acrobat format (PDF file). You will also find publicly available documents such as the Comms manual, OPL manuals in HTML format, Message Suite and Psion's screensaver, plus *VerChk*, a small utility that reports version numbers of all of PsiWin's components.

Corporate users will find evaluation copies of the plug-in software for *Novell GroupWise* and *Act!* on the PsiWin CD. Psion's *InSync* for Lotus Notes software is now available as a separate purchase.



A small example of VerChk

"Why should I pay for 2.2, when 2.1 is free?' Browsing the Psion discussion groups shows that this question has been asked by a lot of users. Ultimately, the reason is simple. PsiWin was *not* supplied free, it was included in the purchase price of a Series 5. Machines such as the new 3mx don't include PsiWin, and as such are 'cheaper'. PsiWin 2.2 is still being supplied with new Series 5s. Existing users who feel cheated that they have to pay for the bug fixes and general improvements made in v2.2, should note that a free 'Service Pack' for v2.1 has been announced by Psion and should be available from *www.psion.com* by the time you read this.

PsiWin 2.2 runs on Windows 95/98 or Windows NT 4.0, and 20MB of available hard disk space is required. The English version was released on September 1st, with German, French, Dutch, Italian and Spanish versions due "soon after".

Pete Sipple

PsiWin 2.2

From: All Psion dealers

Availability: now (see above)

Runs on: Series 3a/3c/3mx/Siena/S5

Supplied on: CD-ROM

Price: Free with new Series 5s, otherwise £49.95 with cable, £29.95 for CD only (all including VAT)

Quality:

Value:

Message Suite 1.52

Series 5

Message Suite, Psion's free software for web browsing, email and fax, was released back in November 1997, and has now matured into version 1.52 (at the time of going to press). As well as a few minor cosmetic changes, Psion have added some new features:

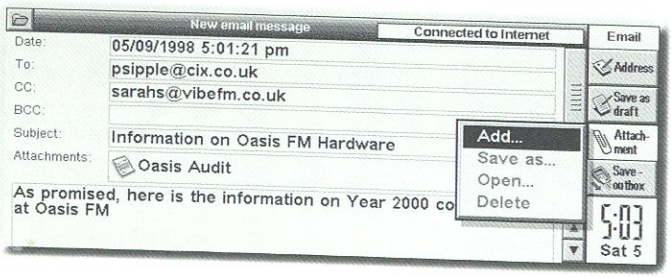
Email attachments. You can now send and receive documents, pictures and files 'attached' to email messages. This long awaited feature has always been a part of PsiMail Internet for the Series 3 range, now Series 5 users can at last deal with MIME (Base 64) and UUencoded attachments.

If you receive a message with an attachment you have the option to either save it to any folder on your machine, or attempt to open it directly. If it's a Series 5 file type, such as SKETCH, WORD, RECORD or SHEET, clicking on its icon will fire up the appropriate application, opening the file in a read-only state. To edit the file, just 'save as' and reopen the new document. There is one exception...

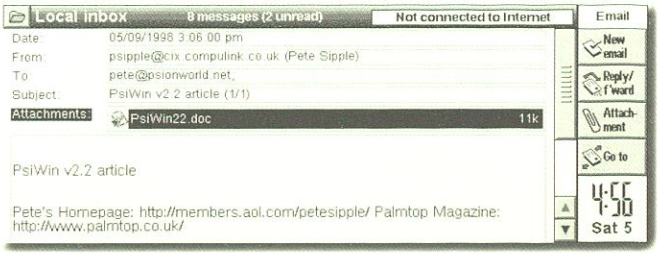
Word attachments. Psion have supplied a simple viewer for Microsoft Word 95, Word 97 and plain text files. If someone mails you a file in one of those formats it can be read directly on your Series 5. Clicking on the attachment starts up WORD, with a brief message indicating that a format conversion is in progress. The converted file is read-only, but quite readable. Most formatting is lost, but that is to be expected. Hopefully, support for other word processor formats will follow, together with convertors for spreadsheets and image files. This conversion only works one way, so if you want to mail a Series 5 WORD file, you'll need to export it to a text file first, assuming that your recipient is using a non-Psion word processor.

Multiple mailboxes. Another handy feature for the power user is the ability to have more than one mailbox. If you have both home and office email accounts you can easily switch between them without having to chop and change your POP and SMTP details each time. From the 'Tools' menu, follow 'Settings' then 'Mailboxes'. From there you can switch accounts and add, rename and delete mail-boxes. Powerful and useful.

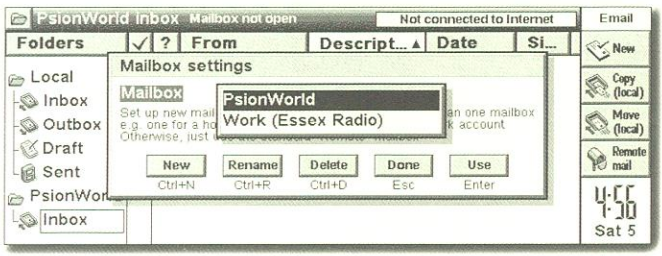
Improved setup. From the system screen's control panel, you'll notice a change of icon. The 'network' icon becomes a more sensible 'Internet' and now includes a post-connect terminal dialog which will help those experi-encing connection problems, or users who are debugging their script files. There is also a new login script command to aid connection to 'challenge-response' network servers.



Adding an attachment



An email with embedded attachment



Selecting a different mailbox

If you are upgrading from a previous version of Message Suite, the advice from Psion is to install it over the top of your existing installation, otherwise you'll lose all of your settings. The upgrade from v1.0 to v1.1 and then to v1.5 was smooth, with no errors. If you have EasyFax installed, you're now advised to remove it, as the two programs are not compatible.

To install the package you'll need a maximum of 1650KB free disk space, and to connect to the web and send email you should have at least 1MB of free system memory. The manual for Message Suite comes with the software as a PDF (Adobe Acrobat) file and is very helpful and comprehensive. Psion state that they do not recommend installing the software onto the internal disk of a 4MB Series 5, as this would clearly leave memory unusably short. Owners of this model should use a CompactFlash disk to store the Message Suite software.

An already solid program with some excellent enhancements. Some very small changes to the web software, together with better-worded prompts throughout make Message Suite 1.52 flexible and a pleasure to use.

Pete Sipple

Message Suite 1.52

From: www.psion.com

Availability: now

Runs on: Series 5

Supplied on: www only, or supplied on PsiWin CD with new Series 5s

Price: FREE

Quality:

Value:

Street Planner '99

Series 5/Geofox One

Every once in a while, a piece of computer software appears that is so compelling that it becomes a singular reason to buy the computer it was designed to run on. Visicalc and Lotus 1-2-3 were the reason many people needed to justify the purchase of a desktop PC, and Palmtop BV's *Street Planner '99* may just be *that* product for the Series 5.

Autoroute Express and *Route Planner* (En Route) enabled your Psion to map out directions between cities, and Route Planner on the Series 5 could even operate across international boundaries. But once in a built-up area they would only show major roads, so were of little use once you got to your destination city and needed to find a particular location within it.

Street Planner is not a replacement for city-to-city level route planners, but an adjunct to them, offering route planning *within* cities and towns, down to the smallest street and lane. Whether the towns *you* need are supplied with Street Planner depends upon where you live. The product will initially be available in two separate versions:

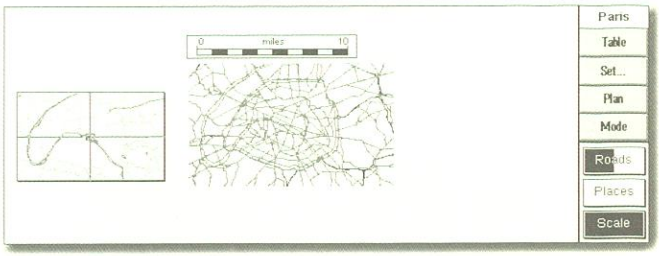
1. A UK-only version that includes more than 1,500 towns and cities.
2. A European version covering towns in Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany and Switzerland with populations over about 50,000 people, plus larger cities with populations over 350,000 for the remainder of Western Europe.

The UK version is so comprehensive that almost every town is included. I tried hard to find a named road in my own town (of 20,000 people) that *wasn't* included in Street Planner, but failed. Of course, you won't find the unnamed dirt track that runs behind your back garden, but all other roads are there, together with major railway stations, some filling stations and names of any surrounding towns or villages.

Only a limited selection of towns/cities were available for the pre-release version of Street Planner we reviewed, but most maps appear to cover an area 10-15 miles (15-25km) square. This means that even if you don't live *in* a larger town or city, your locale will still be included if it falls within these boundaries.

The vast number of towns and cities in each version of the program are supplied on Palmtop BV's usual CD-ROM format, with an install program that runs under Windows. No user will have enough storage space on their Series 5 for the whole collection, so towns can easily be selected, added and removed via the installation program as desired. File

Part of Paris in high detail, showing arrows to indicate one-way Streets



Paris once again, this time zoomed right out to show the extents of the map and the 'locator' to the left of the map

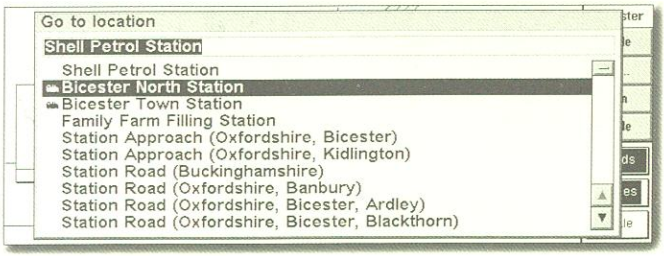
sizes range from under 100KB for an average town of 20,000 inhabitants to over 1MB for big cities such as London and Paris. This is surprisingly compact, considering that an example 3.5 mile (5km) route in London analysed no less than 22 *thousand* possible roads, all in under a minute!

Before rushing out to buy Street Planner it's important to note that whatever towns and cities you choose to load, the software cannot be used to find your way *between* those cities. The London map will only take you between locations *within* London—it won't tell you how to get to Edinburgh.

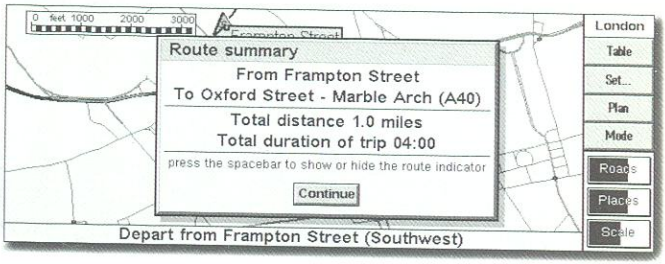
Street Planner presents an almost identical interface to its sister product, Route Planner. Map scale, place name detail and road detail are all controlled at the touch of a pen, and the map can even be zoomed to a rectangle dragged out on the Series 5 screen. A moveable scale in either metric or imperial units shows the current zoom setting, and an optional 'locator' window shows the current screen location in relation to an overview map. Dragging the cross-hair cursor on the locator window will move the screen display to that general location, making it easier to scan freely around the whole map.

Road detail importantly includes information on all one-way systems, presenting triangular arrows to indicate the direction of traffic flow and indicating pedestrian-only roads by dotted lines. When planning a route, you can select the quickest or shortest routes, by vehicle or by foot—the latter of course ignoring any one-way streets. Apart from defining departure and destination points, up to four additional 'vias' can be stipulated, which avoids having to calculate each leg of a journey as a separate route.

If you have advance information on congested areas to avoid on your journey, these can be defined either road-by-road, or by highlighting an entire rectangular area on the map. As with Route Planner, an extensive 'Preferences' screen allows you to customise



When you choose a location, long roads often have several entries to help define your position more precisely



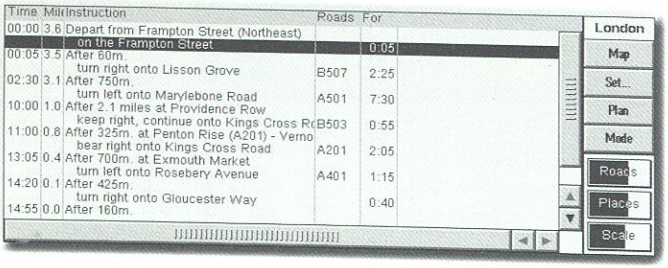
Showing the route summary for a trip, including the total distance and estimated journey time

the kind of road types you prefer to travel on and your estimated road speed on each type. This information is then used when estimating journey times.

Once a journey has been selected, Street Planner will examine all possible routes based upon the preferences you have set, and will, after a short calculation period, display the optimum route highlighted on screen. A quick tap of the 'Table' button switches to a detailed tabular list of instructions, giving precise details of every turn in the route, mentioning each road and junction by name.

As with Route Planner, full GPS support is included, showing a moving cross-hair cursor to indicate your current position. Given the high resolution and accuracy of Street Planner, the accuracy limitations of non-military GPS becomes apparent (see our GPS article in issue 19), with the cursor sometimes appearing a couple of streets away from your true location. The software tries to cope with this by allowing a GPS error offset to be entered, but this understandably can't take account of the fact that GPS accuracy actually changes over time. Hooking up to a GPS is still immensely useful though, and ensures that you are always on roughly the right track.

The only obvious omission from Street Planner is the location of major points of interest, such as tourist attractions, shopping centres, etc. These can be added yourself and stored as overlay files, allowing a whole library of your own interest points to be kept at hand. Adding an overlay is as simple as creating a name for it, then moving the cursor to a point you want to add and choosing 'New location...' from the 'Overlay' menu. You can even add custom icons for each overlay type from within Street Planner, to make each entry easier to recognise. Let's hope that either Palmtop BV or some other enterprising company will soon set to work on creating additional overlays for major cities. In any case, keen users are likely to fill


Time Mil Instruction Roads For
00:00 3.6 Depart from Frampton Street (Northeast)
on the Frampton Street 0:05
00:05 3.5 After 80m
turn right onto Lisson Grove B507 2:25
02:30 3.1 After 750m.
turn left onto Marylebone Road A501 7:30
10:00 1.0 After 2.1 miles at Providence Row
keep right, continue onto Kings Cross Rd B503 0:55
11:00 0.8 After 325m. at Penton Rise (A201) - Verno
bear right onto Kings Cross Road A201 2:05
13:05 0.4 After 700m. at Exmouth Market
turn left onto Rosebery Avenue A401 1:15
14:20 0.1 After 425m.
turn right onto Gloucester Way 0:40
14:55 0.0 After 160m.
London
Map
Set...
Plan
Mode
Roads
Places
Scale

Street by Street and turn by turn—'Table' view for your chosen route

The big picture—Madrid shown on the screen of the Series 5-compatible Geofox One. Note the 'Overlay' menu

in some of the gaps themselves, making their own collections of overlays available to all.

Other useful features of this software include the ability to assign 'hot keys' to the ten most frequently-used points in each town, allowing you to jump straight to a location by pressing one of the number keys 0-9. Tapping on any street will bring up its name regardless of the current zoom settings, and a quick menu selection will bring up the exact latitude and longitude of your current cursor position—handy for adding custom locations into the Series 5's WORLD application.

Overall, Street Planner '99 is hard to fault. For anyone who has ever needed to pull out a city A-Z map, this software avoids having to carry bulky books around and offers far clearer and more accurate instructions than a printed guide ever could. Most importantly, *all* roads appear to be present for each town/city map, so there's no risk that the particular street you're looking for won't be included, no matter what obscure corner of town it's located in.

The lack of built-in overlays for places of interest is certainly disappointing, but it would be unfair to penalise our rating of the product too much for this omission, particularly given the vast amount of data that *is* included, and the very reasonable price Palmtop BV are charging.

The big disappointment is for those who don't live in one of the countries covered by Street Planner. Given how fabulously useful this software is, I expect to hear an outcry from the many Psion users outside Europe, together with those in European countries that don't have the level of coverage offered for the UK, the Benelux countries, Germany and Switzerland.

Steve Clack

Street Planner '99

From: all major Psion dealers

Availability: by early Nov. (6 languages)

Contact: n/a

Runs on: Series 5/Geofox One

Supplied on: CD-ROM

Price: £49.95 including VAT

Quality:

Value:

Psi-Mapper/London

Series 5/Geofox One

It's interesting that the preceding review of the otherwise excellent *Street Planner '99* pointed out the lack of overlays supplied with the product. I can only imagine the *immense* size of the task of compiling and maintaining overlays for each of the cities provided and so wasn't hugely surprised. Steve Litchfield has taken a very different approach here, concentrating just on Greater London and not worrying about plotting every single minor road. By restricting the scope of *Psi-Mapper/London* in this way, he's been able to focus more on compiling overlays of items of interest, making the program more of a gazetteer than an A-Z.

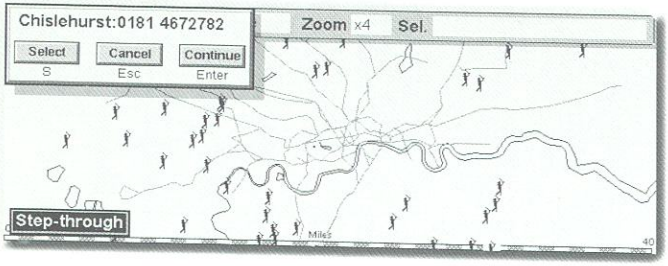
The overlays work in much the same way as in Street Planner. Once zoomed in, each icon is shown with the name of the item and a line of optional reference information (usually the telephone number, hours of opening, etc.) The author provides 18 overlays, including tube stations, places of interest, major hotels, markets, golf courses, police stations and pizza restaurants. The choice of overlays is fairly personal, but the documentation states that many of them were supplied by users, so it's not inconceivable that an overlay *you* create might be shipped with future versions.

It's certainly easy enough to create (and add to) a new overlay, using the built-in cross-hairs, although you have to use a separate utility to edit or delete entries, a system which seems rather clumsy. Making new icons is also relatively tortuous, involving fiddling around in SKETCH and then exporting and moving.

Although both item and vector overlays (including tube and railway lines) can be made 'sticky', so that they get drawn every time the map is zoomed or scrolled, it's a shame that you can only choose one of each type at a time. Zooming in also reveals the fairly low resolution of Psi-Mapper/London's road data, with nothing included below 'B' road status. Each road is labelled horizontally with a rather spidery marker line and the system works quite well in most cases, even if the screen sometimes gets a little cluttered.

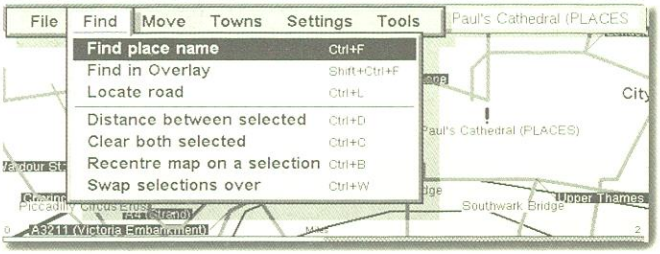
Places, overlay items and named roads can be located using the simple search system, with over 900 place names included across the capital. You can also add your own if you need to, using the usual 'point and shoot' cross-hairs. Most common operations can be performed with the pen as well as the keyboard, with good use of the zoom command icons and a well-designed toolbar at the top of the screen.

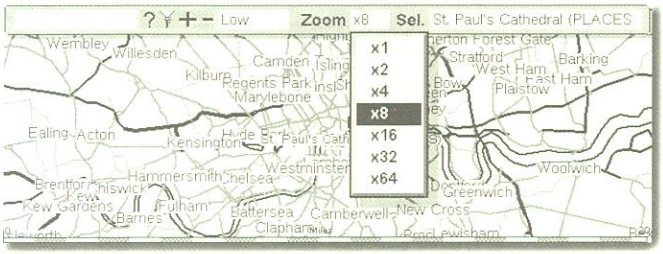
There's no pretence at route-planning here, although a rudimentary distancing system



Just two of Psi-Mapper/London's overlays: golf courses and tube lines...

Working at maximum zoom





More zoom options in Psi-Mapper/London

allows rough and ready calculations to be estimated. A clever feature is that calculations can include specific overlay items as start or end points. Other gadgets include a solar compass and the facility to write directly on the map screen, which although surprisingly useful is rather let down by the lack of a print function. Another small omission is support for input from a GPS, something which previous versions had included, with technical difficulties being cited as the reason.

Despite its limitations, Psi-Mapper/London's availability as unrestricted shareware means that it's completely free to download and use, although the author does ask you to register the program if you find it useful. It's also very compact, at less than 300KB, making it ideal to tuck away for emergencies.

Paul Nelson

Psi-Mapper/London

From: usual shareware sources

Availability: now (English only)

Contact: *3lib.ukonline.co.uk*

Runs on: S5/Geofox, S3 also available

Supplied on: n/a

Price: £14

Quality:

Value:

CalliGrapher

Series 5

Ten Months ago I reviewed Purple Software's *Allegro* package, which offers individual character recognition by entering single gestures into a small 'window' that can be brought to the foreground of any application. The program was praised for its ingenuity, but it failed the acid test—being unable to compete seriously with keyboard entry in any conditions apart from almost complete darkness, where a keyboard is of course unusable. Hours of practice realised a text input speed of no more than 10 words per minute, dismal by any sensible benchmark.

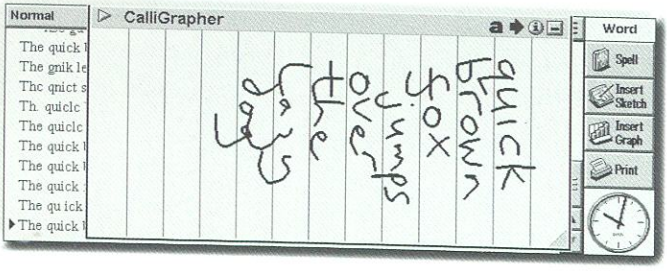
CalliGrapher, developed by Atelier (of *PsiMac* and *Essential Disk Utilities* fame), claims improved ease of use, allowing text to be entered in a more natural fashion into a resizeable window, effectively using the Series 5's touch sensitive screen as a virtual 'notepad'. Not only can text be entered without the need to learn 'unnatural gestures' in place of normal letters, but the software can even be set to accept cursive (joined) handwriting—at least that's the theory.

In reality, Calligrapher will translate your handwriting with better than 90% accuracy given an hour or so of practice, but as with Allegro, the faster you try to write, the more the accuracy suffers. The 90 percent figure is quite possible if writing slow, deliberate strokes, but as soon as you try to approach the speed of normal writing, everything goes belly up. Input accuracy at an attempted 20 words per minute drops to well below 50 percent, requiring endless and frustrating corrections.

Another problem is that at higher input speeds the screen can't keep up with drawing each character, leading to disconcerting gaps in the on-screen representation of your text.

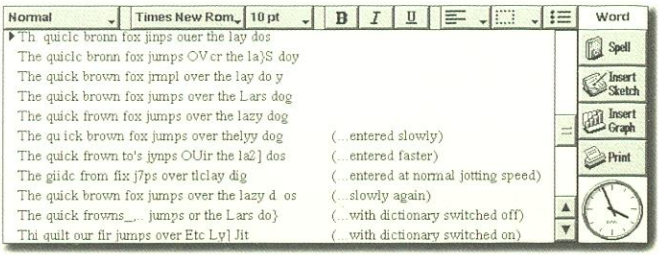
Performance aside, Calligrapher is well implemented. It offers a number of configuration options, mostly designed to hone recognition accuracy. The option to force CalliGrapher to resolve all entered text to fit its built-in dictionary does help recognition accuracy somewhat, particularly if using the larger, 65000 word version. The downside is firstly that the already slow recognition system imposes an even greater time lag before sending converted text to the background application, and secondly that wrongly interpreted words tend to be converted to ridiculous (if humorous) alternatives.

A couple of hours of experimenting with CalliGrapher settings showed that large, single characters gave the best recognition accuracy, but this had the drawback of only allowing half a dozen words in even a full-



Entering text into the resizeable CalliGrapher window at about 10 words per minute, so it can keep up...

Isn't this fun? Trying to eke the best possible accuracy out of the software...


Normal
Times New Rom
10 pt
B
I
U
Word
Spell
Insert Sketch
Insert Graph
Print
Th quiclc bronn fox jinps ouer the lay dos
The quiclc bronn fox jumps OVcr the la)S doy
The quick brown fox jrmpl over the lay do y
The quick brown fox jumps over the Lars dog
The quick frown fox jumps over the lazy dog
The qu ick brown fox jumps over thelyy dog (...entered slowly)
The quick frown to's jynps OUir the la2] dos (...entered faster)
The giidc from fix j7ps over tlclay dig (...entered at normal jotting speed)
The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy d os (...slowly again)
The quick frowns_... jumps or the Lars do} (...with dictionary switched off)
Thi quilt our flr jumps over Etc Ly] Jit (...with dictionary switched on)

screen window, requiring more than ten seconds to convert the text and clear the window, ready to enter another half dozen or so. The option to write characters in any orientation is helpful, and writing with the Psion either upside down or sideways helps to avoid accidental presses of the keyboard, which (ironically) gets in the way.

As with Purple Software's Allegro, CalliGrapher uses a 'glossary' feature to allow entry of short-codes in place of words or phrases. This is well-implemented and easy to use, though stopping to create new glossary entries obviously slows the process even further.

The bottom line on this product is that it can't possibly compete with keyboard entry, even if that keyboard entry is done with only one finger. This reduces its value to situations where keyboard entry is impossible. In this respect CalliGrapher is also foiled, by a freeware program, *NightKeys* (see box below).

Given the extra horsepower of a faster processor CalliGrapher's performance may become acceptable, removing the need to enter characters *soooo* slowly in order to achieve reasonable accuracy. Until then, most users will prefer to stick to the Series 5's superb keyboard or to the faster (and free) *NightKeys*.

Steve Clack

Nightkeys

Although by no means the perfect solution, the freeware *NightKeys* offers a resizeable on-screen 'keyboard' that allows characters to be tapped into the underlying application much more quickly than with either CalliGrapher or Allegro. Nightkeys is available from the usual shareware sources.

CalliGrapher

From: major Psion dealers

Availability: now

Contact: +33 144 650010

Runs on: Series 5

Supplied on: floppy disk

Price: £49.95 including VAT

Quality:

Value:

Bridge

Series 5/Geofox One

The first time you start up Purple Software's *Bridge* you get an impression of quality, one I have learned to expect from my experience of their other products. The attention to detail in the opening credit screen (shown below) is carried through to all of the other screen presentations. All display layouts are models of clarity and logic, complemented by finely crafted graphics.

As you may be able to tell from the screen-shot below, I was reviewing a beta-test version, so some of the details described here may change slightly in the final product. Despite the fact that I was using pre-release software, I didn't detect any problems and the package seemed to be well behaved and complete.

Bridge is supplied on floppy disk in 'SIS' file format, so installation on an EPOC system is simplicity itself—the procedure is clearly described in the documentation. Once installed the user has to complete a simple one-time registration procedure when the application is run for the first time.

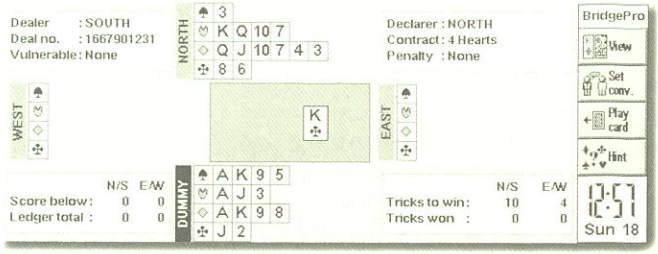
Purple's Bridge plays Contract Bridge, a game usually played by four people acting in pairs called East/West and North/South. However, it is possible to configure Bridge to play any, none, or even *all* of the hands. After the cards are dealt, a bidding process is conducted to determine which pair will obtain, and subsequently try to make, the contract. During card play the holders of the contract aim to win at least as many tricks as the contract specifies, more if possible. It should be the aim of the opposition to prevent the 'Declarers' from making their contract. To challenge its human opponent Bridge must be able to bid sensibly and to play its hands correctly to win as many tricks as possible.

Normally the deal of the cards is a purely random process, but Bridge has options that allow the user to set up a deal manually, or to select a particularly interesting previous deal via a 'Deal number'. When the cards are dealt automatically a 'Deal number' is assigned, which can be noted accordingly. In addition, a facility is available to search for deals in which hands have a particular distribution of strength, or which will result in a particular contract being established.

Bridge has two principal view modes: 'Text View' and 'Card View', as illustrated in the screen shots over the page.

Bidding conventions differ between countries, clubs and personal preferences. In the UK the 'Acol' system is used most often, in the US the 'American Standard' system is in widespread use. Bridge can be set to Acol or

Slick from the outset—Purple's Software's Bridge



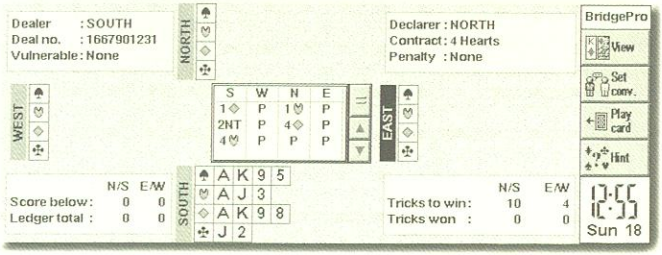
A deal shown in 'Text View'

American Standard bidding, with considerable additional flexibility within these two conventions. The convention chosen can be individually set for the East/West and North/South pairs. During the bidding process, hints can be obtained on the next appropriate bid. If required, a specific contract may be set up manually.

Bridge was very quick. For example, during card play there were no appreciable delays while decisions were made. Also, the excellent screen layouts and view options made it a pleasure to play. It is also extremely flexible, providing options to take back plays or bids, review tricks, keep track of the score/progress against the contract and to claim or concede hands where the outcome of the next few tricks are inevitable.

Two manuals were supplied in electronic format (Adobe Acrobat PDF): a main 25-page application manual plus an additional 37-page bidding manual. The main application manual will also be supplied in printed form in the finished package. All menu and configuration options were clearly explained in the manuals and additional concise pertinent online help

A deal shown in 'Card View'



Bidding in 'Text View'

was available via the 'Tools|Help' menu option.

Clear, easily understood sections of the manual were provided on the fundamental rules of the game, bidding, card play and scoring. Purchasers of Bridge wishing to try their hand at the game for the first time have all they need to get started. However, while the rules of Bridge are reasonably simple to acquire, it is a complex and subtle game that requires considerable experience to play well, hence a good tutorial book would be of benefit to keen players.

The underlying engine for Purple Software's Bridge was written by Tim Scanlon who, I understand, is a very experienced and competent Bridge player. I do not claim to be a Bridge expert and therefore cannot give detailed insight on the standards of bidding or card play I observed. However, it did strike me as a little odd that it was not possible to change the play level. Similarly, there is an option to allow the player to see all the cards, but it wasn't clear whether the computer was also able to 'view all the cards' to allow it to play cards to the best of its ability.

Despite the fact that I was using a beta release of Bridge, it was an impressive product. It looks great and even though it is very flexible, with numerous options and views, was still very easy to use.

Two separate Bridge products have now emerged within months of each other, so the need to draw comparisons between Purple Software's Bridge and Breva Software's *P-Plus Bridge* is inescapable yet difficult. The perceived quality and value for money for software of this type centres around three key factors: price, the look and feel of the user interface and the fundamental challenge presented to the player by the game 'engine'.

Without conducting extensive comparative trials (involving hundreds of games) it's impossible to gauge which of the two Bridge games is the stronger player. However, on the basis of presentation quality, speed, ease of use and price it seems that Purple Software's Bridge has the overall lead.

Leigh Edwards

Bridge

From: major Psion dealers

Availability: now (English, French, Ger.)

Contact: 0171 3877777

Runs on: Series 5/Geofox One

Supplied on: floppy disk

Price: £49.95 including VAT

Quality:

Value:

Downloadable demos...

Breva's *P-Plus Bridge* is already available as a downloadable demonstration from their web site (see review on page 24 of issue 19) and from our own CD04. A similar demonstration version of Purple Software's Bridge is likely to be made available from their web site (see the news section on page 10 of this issue).

Bridge aficionados may like to take advantage of demonstration copies to help find their personal favourite from the two packages before making a purchase.

Economist Diary Companion 1999

Series 3/Siena/Series 5/Geofox One

I was impressed with On Board Info's original *Notable Dates and events* when I reviewed it back in 1997, and even more impressed with the updated *Agenda Companion* in 1998. Their new 1999 *Economist Diary Companion* continues this positive trend, including more useful information than ever before.

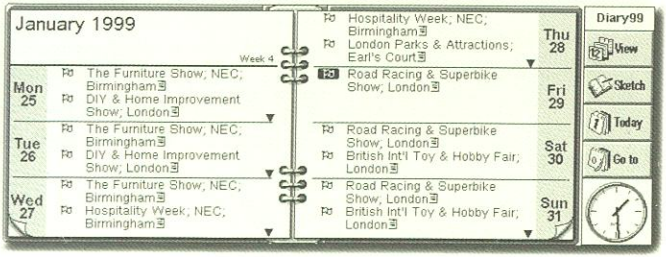
The software now comprises two sections: the first creates an AGENDA file for your Psion, containing a customisable range of useful dates and events throughout 1999. Categories vary from public holidays and religious festivals through to trade fairs, sporting events and many others.

The second section gathers together a mass of useful reference information, such as weights and measures conversions, international economic information, money and finance data, common abbreviations, etc.

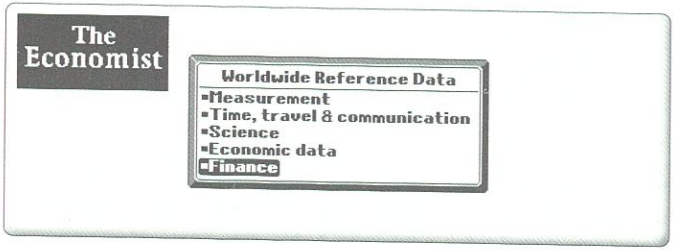
Installation from the supplied CD-ROM is done via some very slick Windows 3.1 or Windows 95 setup routines, offering multi-tiered menus from which the dozens of data options can be selected. The installation CD actually loads the entire setup routine onto your PC (in either English, French or German), so it's easy to go back and reinstall extra information categories at a later date. The software can be loaded onto any Series 3, Siena or Series 5/Geofox machine, plus a wide range of other palmtop computers and PC-based diary programs.

The AGENDA-based *Diary Companion* includes data categories primarily for the UK, USA, France and Germany, and is initially loaded into your Psion computer as a new AGENDA file (regardless of the Psion model you are using), with each item showing as a separate entry. Most entries also include a short memo attachment, usually giving contact telephone numbers and email/web addresses for the event in question. The Diary Companion AGENDA file can either be kept separate from your main diary file or integrated with it using AGENDA's standard 'Merge' feature. For those who need only the Diary Companion half of the product, it can be purchased without the Economist reference information for £12.95 (inc. VAT).

The Economist Reference Data section is simply a large collection of useful facts and figures sourced from The Economist's publications, all collated into a group of separate WORD and SHEET files. Access to the various files is via a single 'Worldref' program. Selecting this brings up a submenu of the main categories, with further submenus beneath it. A full installation takes just over 500K of space.

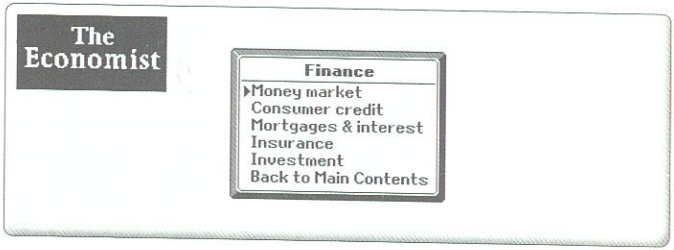


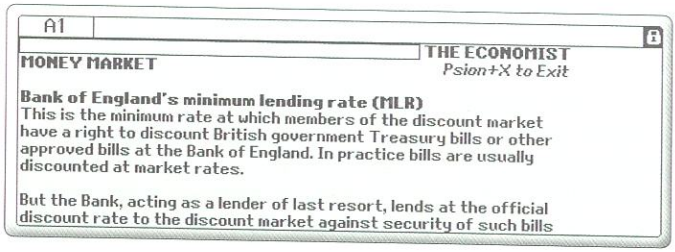
The 'Agenda Companion' half of the product, shown running on a Series 5.



The top-level menu of the Worldwide Reference Data section, shown running on a Series 3

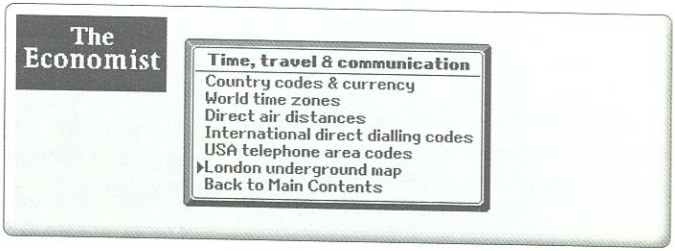
A second-level menu, showing all the options available within the 'Finance' category

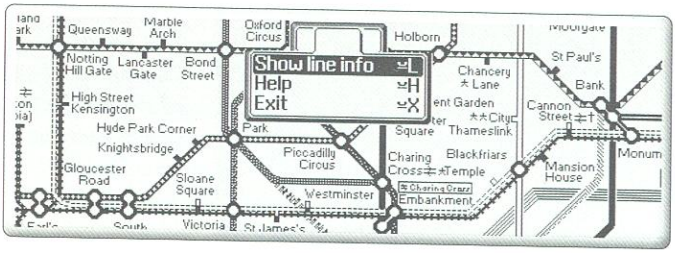



A1
THE ECONOMIST
Psion+X to Exit
MONEY MARKET
Bank of England's minimum lending rate (MLR)
This is the minimum rate at which members of the discount market have a right to discount British government Treasury bills or other approved bills at the Bank of England. In practice bills are usually discounted at market rates.
But the Bank, acting as a lender of last resort, lends at the official discount rate to the discount market against security of such bills

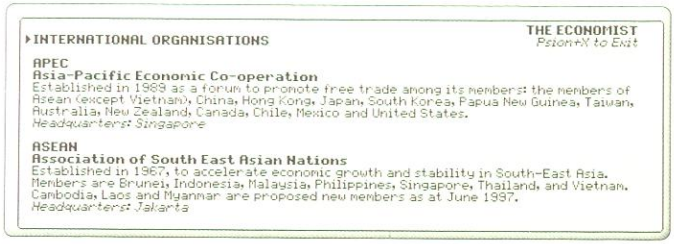
Selecting the 'Money market' option from the menu above takes you into a useful spreadsheet...

Showing the variety of information under another of the five main submenus





An odd addition to the suite, perhaps, but useful nonetheless...


▸INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS
THE ECONOMIST
Psion+X to Exit
APEC
Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation
Established in 1989 as a forum to promote free trade among its members: the members of Asean (except Vietnam), China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Papua New Guinea, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Chile, Mexico and United States.
Headquarters: Singapore
ASEAN
Association of South East Asian Nations
Established in 1967, to accelerate economic growth and stability in South-East Asia. Members are Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar are proposed new members as at June 1997.
Headquarters: Jakarta

More useful information—this time a multi-page WORD file on International Organisations

As can be seen from the variety of screenshots over these two pages, the span of information covered is impressive, particularly as everything is partnered with the Diary Companion information, which even includes free downloadable updates from On-Board Info's web site (*www.on-board-info.com*).

The only piece of data not presented as a WORD or SHEET file is a London Underground map, which opens as a scrollable graphic image (see screenshot opposite). This is a handy inclusion to the package, further increasing its value.

It's convenient to be able to use your Psion's built-in 'Find' features to pick out information within the WORD and SHEET files, and many of the spreadsheets include calculation cells where 'live' data can be entered. The worksheets are all correctly set-up with locked cells where appropriate to prevent accidental modification of the underlying formulae.

The only downside to providing all the information in this form is that no use can be made of data 'hotlinks', as would be the case if it were in the form of browsable web pages. Although this makes the data less multi-dimensional, On-Board Info have sensibly chosen the WORD/SHEET method in preference, citing Psion's web browsers as too slow for the task.

Although aimed at business people, the Economist Reference Data section (which is only available as part of the full Diary Companion product) contains a fair amount of handy information for non-business users, and there's a lot to be learnt from casual perusal during odd spare moments (now what *is* the capital of Venezuela?)

Provided that you have PC access (you can't load it without one), The Economist Diary Companion 1999 is a must-have for almost every serious Psion owner within the countries it covers, making your pocketable computer into an even more valuable information repository.

Steve Clack

Economist Companion

From: all major Psion dealers

Availability: now (English/French/Ger.)

Contact: 0171 370 0307

Runs on: all Psions, +PC formats

Supplied on: CD-ROM

Price: £17.95, or £12.95 for diary only (inc. VAT)

Quality:

Value:

Extra! Extra!

Two reviews in one? Or a tale of blood, sweat and a Geofox?

by John Woodthorpe

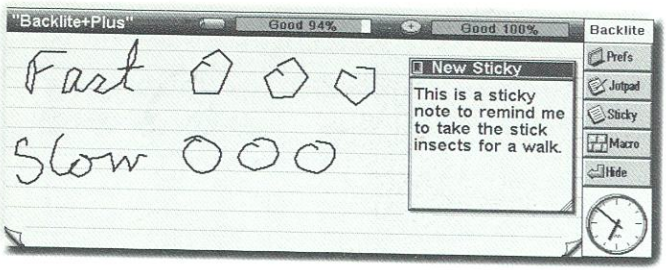
Personally, I blame Steve Litchfield for the range of backlight applications available. Shortly after the launch of the Series 5 he posted a few lines of OPL on the *3-Lib* web site, designed to control the backlight depending on the time of day. Not only that, but he issued a challenge to others to improve upon it. The result was the appearance of several such applications. The first one I noticed was Jason Kneen's *Backlite+Plus*. Initially it was a basic backlight controller and jotpad on which you could make quick notes with the pen.

As it developed it became shareware, and I registered it straight away. Amongst the things added were warnings of low batteries, voice note recording, opening of files on startup, etc. There then followed macros, typed 'sticky' notes, battery condition meters, startup sounds, backdrop images, and so on. I must confess that it was at about that time I started to get frustrated that some of the complexity seemed to reduce the responsiveness and I lost some of my interest. I also started to oscillate between Backlite and Henry Hirst's *HotKeys* as each brought out new versions.

The deciding factor for me was the arrival of a Geofox One for review, and discovering that Backlite wouldn't work on it, but HotKeys would. That's still the case, although the author of Backlite hopes to release a Geofox-compatible version shortly. *ExtraBars* was something I hadn't tried until starting this review, and so I came to it anew, as well as re-visiting *Backlite+Plus* to see how it's changed. Both are available from the author's web site at *http://www.kneen.demon.co.uk/* , and cost £12 each to register. They are both *Palmscape* products and can be obtained from *http://www.palmscape.com/* as well.

Backlite (version 2.1)

This program really looks very slick in use, especially when the helpful battery meters



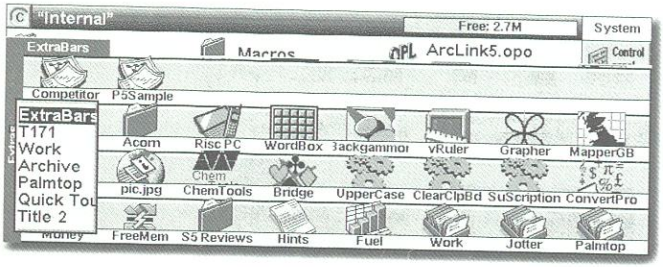
Backlite+Plus with Jotpad and Sticky Notes

are displayed. However, there are times when I feel that there are too many options in the software. That isn't necessarily a problem in itself unless they start to get in the way, but to some extent that *does* happen. For example, some of the hot key shortcuts clash with some of those for the built-in applications. I know I can change the ones in Backlite or simply delete any of the macros I don't want to use, but it did add to the frustration I began to feel. There are also some compromises that don't become apparent until you try things out. For example, writing on the 'jotpad' is a neat idea, but it will make your handwriting look rather angular unless you slow down significantly, and there's no indication of how many pages you're using.

Personally, I find it easier to use an empty 'page' in SKETCH for such scribbled notes, especially as you can easily create a new one by pressing [Fn]-[Sketch]. If you want a background picture on screen, that disables the jotpad anyway.

The backlight control is still there of course, and you can set it to be on between specified hours, constantly when the machine is powered from the mains, or only after sunset. As far as I'm aware, the last option is a feature not present in any other EPOC applications, and is handled by an OPX licensed from RMR Software. It allows you to set your home location in Backlite, and then determines the sunset and sunrise times for that particular day. Unlike in TIME, they don't actually change from day to day unless you remember to re-run that calculation every now and then, so it's something of a compromise.

I sometimes find the response of the backlight control to be a little slow, especially when turning the machine on for the first time after several hours. It often takes a few seconds to switch the backlight on, or to realise that it isn't needed. Some of the other



A Nearly Full ExtraBar, with Macros, Documents and Applications

backlight control applications are significantly quicker, possibly because they aren't so ambitious.

For me, the real difficulty with Backlite is that it tries to do far too much. Although a lot of the complexity can be turned off, I feel it suffers from the way it sometimes slows the machine down. That's especially true in the most critical period when you turn the machine on briefly to look up a piece of information. The author is working on a couple of upgrades to speed up the program, eventually with a substantially re-written version.

Overall, I feel BackLite+Plus is a good idea, let down by some of its complexity.

ExtraBars (version 1.0)

I feel I have to change tack here. Having explained my changing relationship with Backlite, I'll move on to *ExtraBars*. This is totally different in concept and functionality. ExtraBars allows you to organise the Extras bar by replacing it, or supplementing it, with several new ones. I long since ceased to be able to get everything on the main Extras bar, and so finding and opening some applications takes that bit longer. ExtraBars can directly launch applications, documents (for specific applications, text, HTML, JPEG and ZIPs), local web sites and macros (either from *Macro5*, *BackLite* or the new *EScript* ones).

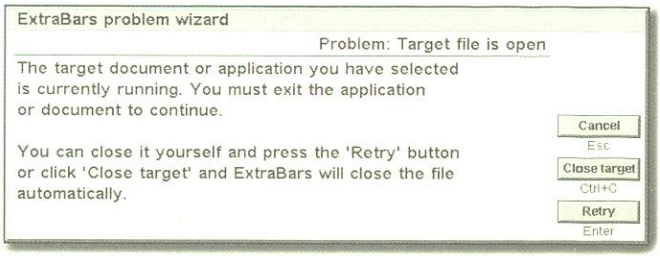
The ability to include macros is excellent, and in some ways it makes ExtraBars rather like a cross between *HotKeys* and *Macro5*.

You can create up to 12 ExtraBars panels (two in the unregistered version), containing up to 40 shortcuts each. That means you can have panels for different purposes, and even automatically run all shortcuts on one panel to set things up for a specific project. Individual entries can be selected by typing the initial letter just as on the system screen, and keystroke shortcuts can be set to switch straight to a specific panel.

There's obviously been a lot of thought put into how a totally new user will get to grips with it, with 'Wizard' help screens that guide you through, report any problems, and even suggest how to resolve them. These are genuinely helpful, especially when you try to add a shortcut to a file that is currently open, and the Wizard offers to close it for you before completing the operation. It doesn't re-open the file afterwards, but that's easy enough to do from the ExtraBar anyway. Just for completeness, that facility will apparently be added shortly.

There are still a few niggles, such as the need to configure the keystroke used to open multiple files (as is also the case with Purple's *Navigator* product). There's also no access to the file selector when adding a local web site,

The ExtraBars Wizard in Action


ExtraBars problem wizard
Problem: Target file is open
The target document or application you have selected is currently running. You must exit the application or document to continue.
You can close it yourself and press the 'Retry' button or click 'Close target' and ExtraBars will close the file automatically.
Cancel
Esc
Close target
Ctrl+C
Retry
Enter

which makes it a bit tedious as you have to enter the exact pathname and can't switch back with [Ctrl]-[Extras] after moving away to see where the file is. It's possible to work around that, though a little awkward.

ExtraBars recommends that you install it on the internal drive, but I'm always looking to save space for open applications and successfully moved it to D: without seeing any noticeable reduction in speed.

Alternatives

I've already mentioned HotKeys, which you can download from:

ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/ahirst/

and if you're into macros, you should look at the article in issue 18 that covers them. You might consider ExtraBars to be a direct replacement for HotKeys, and the author clearly does too, as he provides a plug-in to import shortcuts from it. I'm not so convinced, as you can't control the backlight from ExtraBars, nor can you currently assign keystrokes to specific shortcuts, automatically close and re-open applications before and after a backup, or display specific information on start-up. Most of those can be achieved by writing macros, but it's easier to use HotKeys. The two applications have a very different philosophy, with ExtraBars obviously mimicking the EPOC Extras bar, and HotKeys having a simpler text-based user interface. It's also significantly easier to add local web sites to HotKeys.

All told, I think there's room for both applications, depending on your preferences, and a case to be made for running both—as I now am. I know that the author of HotKeys intended version 2.22 to be released a couple of months ago, but this has been delayed a little.

Conclusions

As I've said, I used to be a great fan of Backlite+Plus, but switched to HotKeys when it seemed to be a faster, more elegant, way of achieving many of the same results. The fact that the two Palmscape products don't currently work properly on the Geofox One is also something owners of that machine should bear in mind.

In revisiting Backlite+Plus I haven't found any real reasons to switch back to it, but ExtraBars is entirely different. It is an outstanding application, and I've gradually been won over to it during the course of writing this review. All the initial problems I encountered with the beta have been speedily solved, and it now seems to be very stable.

Starting up:
Faxing with your Psion

Pete Sipple answers some common questions on sending and receiving faxes with your Psion

Faxing?
With a suitable modem and software, you can send and receive faxed documents using your Psion. You can 'talk', using digital data sent down a telephone line, to an ordinary paper fax machine or to another computer fitted with a fax modem, anywhere in the world. It takes, on average, between 30 seconds and a minute to transmit a sheet of typed A4 text to another fax machine.

What do I need to fax from my Psion?
You need three things: a modem, a telephone line and the appropriate fax software.

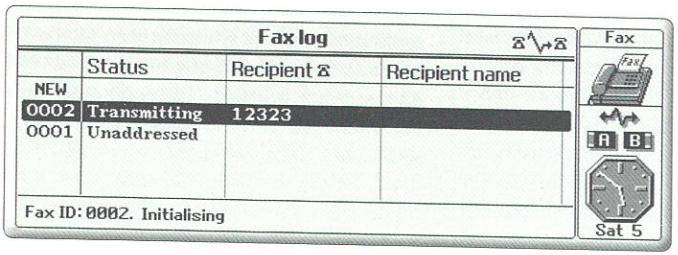
How do I connect to the telephone line?
You will need to plug your Psion into a modem, and plug your modem to the telephone network. For more information, see the section on modems in our beginners guide on connecting to the Internet (starting in issue 18, page 69 onwards).

What software do I need?
If you have a Series 5, then all you need is Message Suite, available free from Psion.

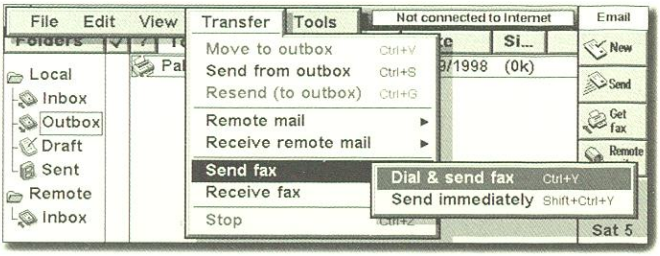
Series 3a/3c/3mx users have three programs available: *PsiFax* or *Faxit* will allow you to send a fax from your machine, and *SIUFax* will allow you to receive faxes. See our summary of software at the end of this article.

Can I fax from my Siena or S3 Classic?
No. Software is only available for the 3a/3c/3mx, Series 5 and Geofox One.

What modem should I use?
If you want to take the easiest route in terms of setup, Series 3c/3mx/Series 5 users should look at the Travel Modem, which is portable and easy to connect. Series 3a users should look for the *3fax*, which comes supplied with the appropriate fax software. Most other Hayes-compatible modems with fax capabilities can be used, but you may need a null-modem adaptor.



Sending a fax from PsiFax



Sending a fax from Message Suite

Do I need to worry about Fax 'Classes' and 'Groups'?

When fax machines first came into existence, they were what is now called 'Group I' machines, and would typically transmit a sheet of A4 paper in about six minutes. Fortunately, the technology has moved on. Most recent machines are 'Group III', and as far as faxing with a Psion is concerned, you don't need to worry about 'Groups'.

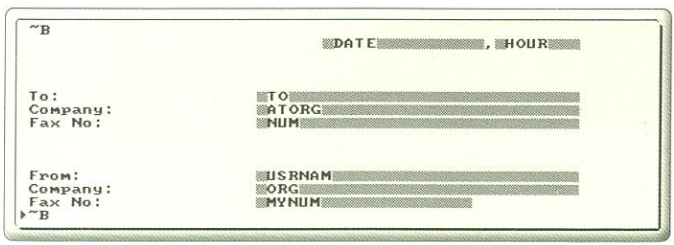
'Class' refers to the standard protocol used when faxing with a modem. 'Class 1' relied on the computer, not the modem, doing all the work, and is now virtually obsolete. 'Class 2.0' is the current standard, and most modems made after 1993 adhere to this. To add to the confusion, 'Class 2' came before 'Class 2.0' and there are some differences between the two standards, but these should not bother most users. All software from Psion supports Class 2.0 and Class 2. Message Suite also supports the older Class 1. If your modem is fairly new there shouldn't be a problem, but you may want to check in your modem's documentation to ensure that it can cope with Class 2 / 2.0 and Group III faxing.

What exactly can I send from my Psion?

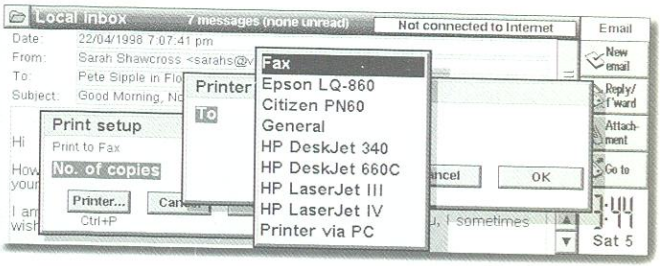
Basically, any of the built-in applications that have a 'print' option: WORD, DATA, AGENDA, JOTTER and SHEET. The way that all of the fax software packages work is that they add a new driver to the list of printers on your Psion, so, if you were in a WORD document and selected 'Print Setup', you could change from your existing printer to 'Fax'. When you then select 'Print', it will treat the document as a fax, and ask you for the number to fax it to. Both PsiFax and Message Suite will allow you to send a coversheet on its own, if you just want to send a short message without an attached document.

What about coversheets?

If you're sending a document as a fax, you will quite often need to add a coversheet, which points out to the recipient who the document is intended for, when it was sent, and by



Editing a cover sheet with FaxIt



Choosing to print a document as a fax

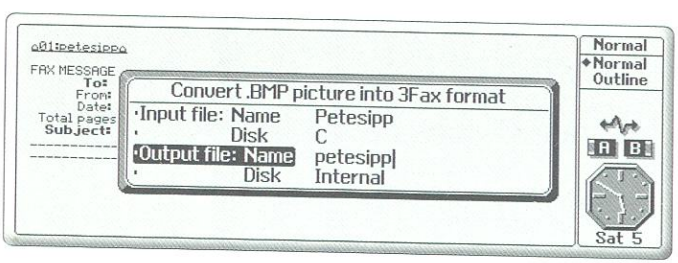
whom. PsiFax for the Series 3 range was more powerful than the software for the Series 5 in this respect, as it had its own in-built coversheet designer to allow you to insert a picture, maybe of your signature or company logo, as well as to design quite complex (and professional-looking) cover-sheets. Message Suite doesn't have a cover-sheet designer, and by default will send a basic plain one. Of course, you can design your own by embedding your own SKETCH images in a WORD document (see Steve Litchfield's article, 'Real World Objects', on page 71 of issue 19).

How do I get a company logo onto faxes?

Many people like to include a company logo and/or a signature on a fax. It makes the end product more corporate—or more personal. You first need to get your logo into a computer-readable format. Artists may be able to draw their own on their Psion (for instance with SKETCH on a Series 5), but otherwise you will need to obtain a copy on disk from your company or scan a printed copy onto a computer. Ideally, aim to get the image as a BMP file, which can be imported directly into PsiFax or converted with PsiWin. Several companies offer a logo scanning/transfer service. Try either Psion PLC (0990 134050) or POS Ltd (0181 6779246).

Can I fax from my mobile phone?

If you have a suitable model, yes. There are several (digital) GSM mobile telephones on the market (though not in the USA) which have a built-in modem, such as the Ericsson GS18 and SH888, which operate via infrared, completely without cables. You can also connect to a mobile phone if you have a compatible PC Card modem and Psion's PC Card Adaptor. Mobile phone technology is changing fast, so check with a knowledgeable dealer for more information on the current telecommunications options available to you.



Inserting your logo into a PsiFax coversheet

How much space do received faxes take? Not as much as you might think. Note that faxes are actually sent as 'pictures', even if they only contain text. The number of words on a fax doesn't affect either the size or the speed of a fax, it's how much of the paper is black in contrast to white that matters. An average page takes up around 20K, although a fax sent in 'fine' resolution will take around 60K of your disk space, depending on the amount of black in it.

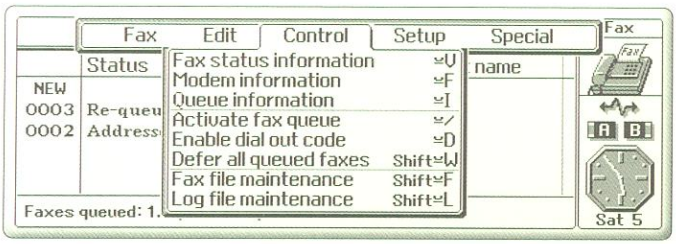
Software availability

3fax (for Series 3a, 512K or higher)

Send-only. Psion's original fax software originally included with the 3fax modem is still available, although most users will want to look out for the newer PsiFax. 3fax allows coversheets and can send up to 10 documents attached to one fax. Available from major Psion dealers, price: £49.95 including VAT (SSD only).

PsiFax (Series 3a/3c/3mx)

Send-only. Psion released this updated version of 3fax in 1997. Psifax allows you to 'print to fax', as well as send cover-sheets. Keeps a log of faxes, retries if the line is busy, and defers faxes for transmission at a later time. PsiFax requires 520K of disk space and needs a minimum of 70K RAM to run. Available from major Psion dealers, price: £49.95 inc VAT (SSD only).



Psifax—packed with features

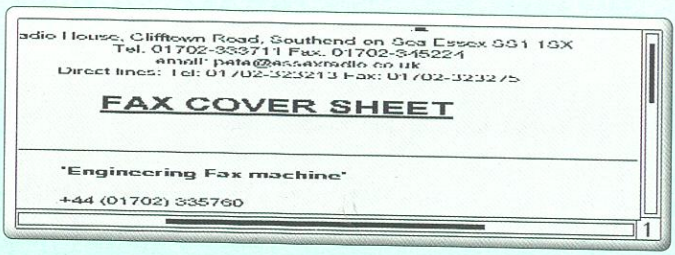
Faxit v2.4 (Series 3a/3c/3mx)

Send-only. The latest version includes coversheets, phonebooks, and now works with the Psion Travel Modem. Smaller and cheaper than PsiFax. Available from usual shareware sources, contact: walterwright@compuserve.com, http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/WalterWright, price: £14 or $25 US.

A queue of faxes waiting to be sent with Faxit

SIUFax (Series 3a/3c/3mx)

Receive-only. View received faxes with three levels of zoom. Available from Exportech, contact: 01202 422570, price: £34.08 inc. VAT.


adio House, Cliftown Road, Southend on Sea Essex SS1 1SX
Tel. 01702-333711 Fax. 01702-345224
email: pete@essexradio.co.uk
Direct lines: Tel: 01702-323213 Fax: 01702-323275
FAX COVER SHEET
'Engineering Fax machine'
+44 (01702) 335760
1

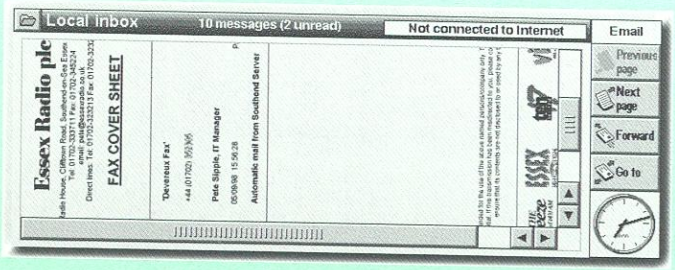
A fax received using SIUFax

EasyFax (Series 5)

Send-and-receive. This program, supplied free by Psion, has now been superseded by Psion's Message Suite. Although EasyFax is still available for download from Psion's website, you are advised to use Message Suite unless you are very short of available disk space and have no need for web/email access.

Message Suite (Series 5)

Send-and-receive. Available free of charge from Psion, you can fax any document whose application supports printing, send and receive faxes up to 14400 bps in standard or fine resolution. Supports faxback and fax forwarding. Available from: Psion, contact: www.psion.com, price: free.



A fax, rotated for full-page viewing

Further Reading:

- PsiFax review - issue 11, page 16
- Message Suite review - issue 15, page 18 (also issue 14, page 18)
- SIUFax review - issue 15, page 26
- Null Modem Adaptor review - issue 18, page 70

A brief history of Psion

We take a look at how it all started—from 1984 until the present day...

by Steve Litchfield

"Imagine how much more convenient and simple your life could be with a full-feature microcomputer—including screen, keyboard, mass storage and software—in your pocket."

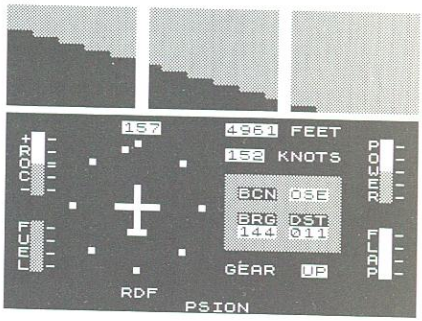
Accompanied by dry ice and lasers, and delivered in a booming voice, the sentence above wouldn't seem out of place in 1998, perhaps applied to the Series 5. It's actually a direct quote from the original Psion Organiser advertisement way back in 1984. The vision of David Potter and the other Psion founders seems not to have faltered in the intervening 14 years. Yes, there have been several blind alleys and wrong turnings, but the company's progress has generally been true to the original concept.

How it all started

Dr David Potter was (and is) an academic at heart. After a scholarship to read Natural Sciences at Cambridge in 1963, he progressed to a doctorate in Mathematical physics (including chaos theory) at Imperial College London. After nine years of teaching during the seventies in both London University and the University of California, he became determined to raise money to start his own software business, involving himself in various money-making projects. These included driving trucks and selling encyclopedias to American Air Force officers in Germany. At one point he even resorted to selling ice creams in Hyde Park! The fashion at the time was for companies with scientific-sounding names, so he crafted a moniker out of **P**otter's **S**cientific **I**nstruments, adding '**ON**' to birth 'PSION' to the world at an office in Baker Street, London, in 1980. Several early employees were ex-students of his from university days, some of whom are still with the company today.

Sinclair software

Psion's first foray into the public eye was in 1982, as a software house writing games for the (then) brand-new Sinclair ZX81. The ZX81 was the first seriously successful computer to be bought by home users and, as ever, games were many people's first priority. Psion's 'FLIGHT simulation' modelled all the essential parameters of flight of a small, 2-engined, propellor-driven plane. It had an instrument panel and even a very basic representation of the outside world, both updated in real-time. A space invaders clone, called 'Space Raiders' was also a big hit with the public, leading Sinclair to commission Psion to write some more games for their new colour machine, the ZX Spectrum.



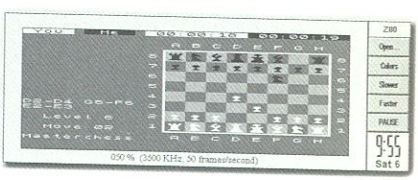
FLIGHT on the Sinclair ZX81

Each machine came bundled with the 'Horizons' tape, including Psion's classic 'Horace Goes Skiing'.

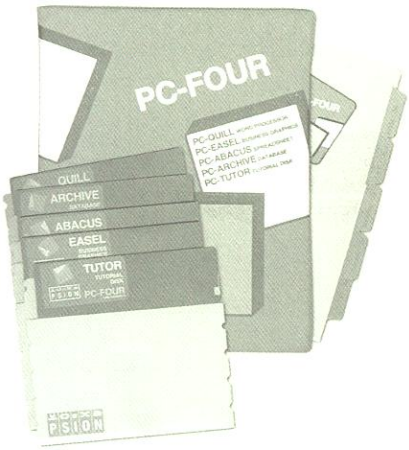
Psion's chess engine for the Spectrum also found acclaim in 1983, playing a remarkably strong game, and paved the way for later development as a game on the PC and Series 3.

Then DOS and QL

As a background to games programming, 1983 also saw Psion hard at work developing an integrated package of business applications, ostensibly designed for the IBM-compatible market and running under DOS. By a strange coincidence, they found themselves bound again to Sinclair, who announced that they were looking for a company to provide business software for

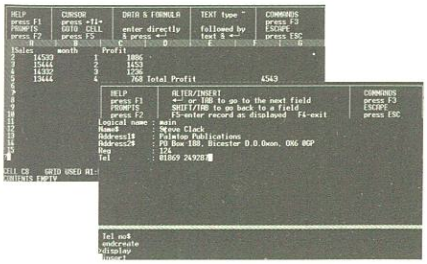


15 years on—Psion's Spectrum Chess game running under Palmtop BV's emulator on the Series 5



their upcoming QL (Quantum Leap) computer. Psion's suite was the obvious choice and was quickly accepted.

In retrospect, the association with the reputedly shambolic QL project was not a commercial or critical success, but reviewers noted the quality of the Psion applications and documentation as highlights of the QL package. In all, four applications were provided for Sinclair: ARCHIVE was a flat file database, EASEL a business graphics utility similar to the graph section of modern-day SHEET, QUILL was a 'grown-up' word processor and ABACUS a fully-featured



ABACUS and ARCHIVE running under DOS

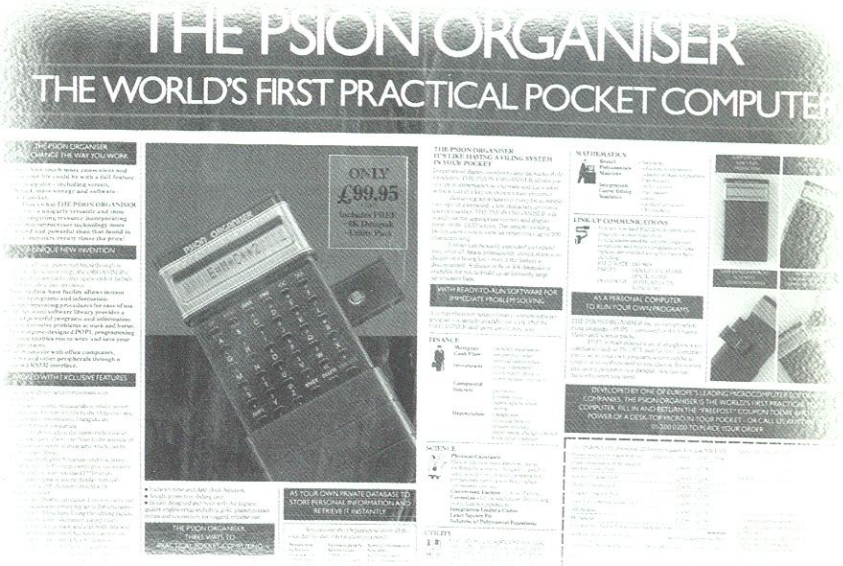
(though text mode throughout) spreadsheet. Each application could share data via intermediate files. Any Psion 3 or 5 user will immediately recognise in the above programs the basics of the modern day ROM software, and it's fascinating to see Psion's innovation at work a full five years before integrated packages became commonplace on desktop PCs. Under the names 'PC-FOUR' and 'Xchange', their suite finally made it onto the PC and other desktop machines in 1985, again to critical acclaim.

Also fascinating is that all development work for the QL was done on a VAX minicomputer. These cabinet-sized machines were very popular in the 80s and ran a superb multitasking operating system called VMS. The experience of working with a well-structured and bomb-proof system obviously rubbed off on Psion's software designers, whose flagship SIBO and EPOC operating systems bear many striking resemblances to VMS under the surface.

Something portable...

Perhaps slightly under the influence at a Greek Taverna in London, David Potter and his partners were bemoaning the lack of portability of the home computers of the day—when you removed the power you lost all the information inside. What was needed was something that was not only portable but could also retain data without mains power. One napkin-sized sketch later, a completely new concept had been born.

The brainwave that was the Psion Organiser may seem limited by today's standards but was revolutionary when it was launched at £99 in 1984. A 14cm by 9cm brick-like unit with an alphabetic keyboard and sliding cover, it boasted 2K of RAM, 4K of applications in ROM and a free 8K datapak which had to be


THE PSION ORGANISER
THE WORLD'S FIRST PRACTICAL POCKET COMPUTE
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PSION ORGANISER
AS YOUR OWN PRIVATE DATABASE TO STORE PERSONAL INFORMATION AND RETRIEVE IT INSTANTLY
MATHEMATICS
LINK-UP COMMUNICATIONS
WITH READY-TO-RUN SOFTWARE FOR IMMEDIATE PROBLEM SOLVING
AS A PERSONAL COMPUTER TO RUN YOUR OWN PROGRAMS
FINANCE
SCIENCE

specially reformatted using ultraviolet light when the time came to erase it. It claimed a battery life of six months on a single 9 Volt PP3 battery—impressive by any standards.

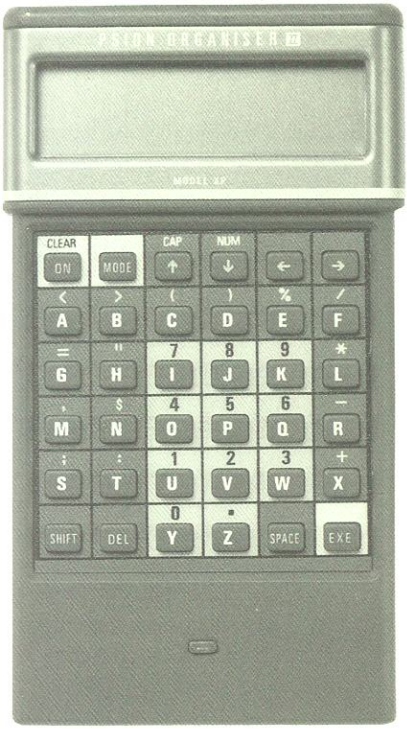
This original Organiser was really just a clock and a flat-file database into which you could put information you wanted to remember, placing it on a par with the £5 credit-card organisers available today. Extra packs were available, including a programming language (POPL) and mathematical and financial functions. The most striking thing about the Organiser, when compared to modern day palmtops, is its incredible robustness. With almost no moving parts, many of the units are still working 15 years later, and the only worry you might have when dropping the solid Organiser was whether the thing you were dropping it *onto* might be damaged. It wasn't short on style either. During my research for this article I showed an Organiser to a friend and was asked "That's nice, is it new?", quite an achievement for a 15-year-old product.

Urban myths

Several urban myths have grown up around the initial production of the Organiser. My favourite is where Psion's engineers were working through the night to finish the prototype and David Potter had to jog down to the local McDonalds every few hours to collect sustenance for them. On returning from one such trip, he found them huddled dumbfounded round a working unit which had just established that 2+2=9! Still, it was only the prototype and the bug was quickly quashed.

Mark two

By the very fact that it broke new ground, the brilliance of the Organiser idea opened users'



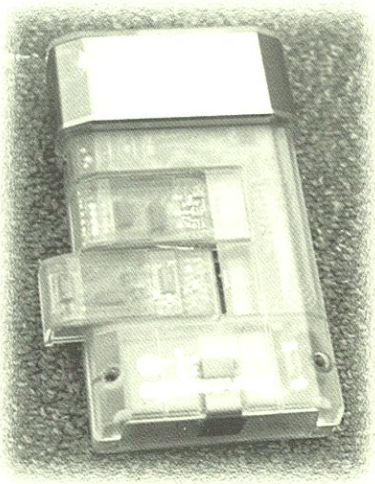
The 2-line Organiser XP (32K RAM)

eyes to the possibilities of the concept and left many wanting more. Enter the launch of the Organiser II in 1986 with more memory, more screen pixels and more style. The basic sliding-cover brick design was retained, complete with the familiar segmented-letters Psion logo for the very first time. Over the next decade, over half a million of this improved model were to be sold, a huge testament to the viability of the concept.

A number of variants were introduced over the next three years. The CM, XP and LZ, with memory sizes from 8K to 64K, all gave more scope for both Psion to increase the amount of applications bundled and for users

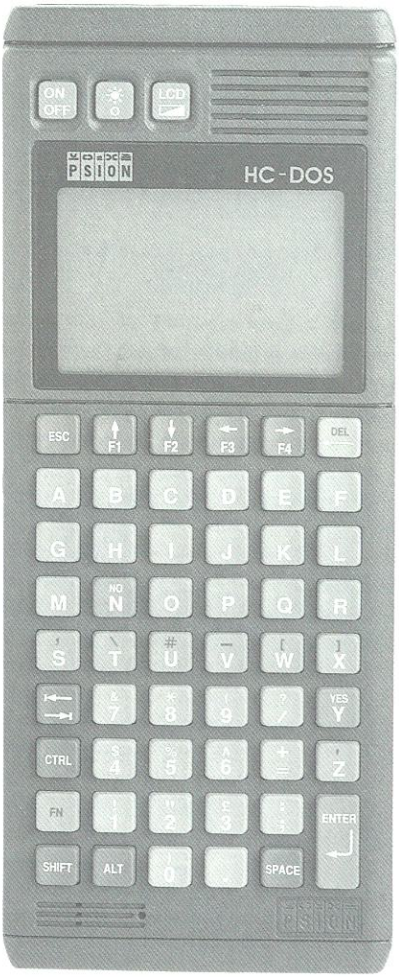
The 4-line Organiser LZ64 (64K RAM)

to store a greater variety of information. Whereas the Organiser had been a useful toy, the Organiser II became the world's first Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), with many

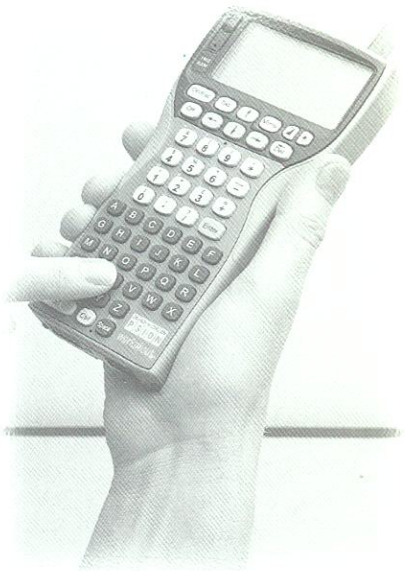


The back of a limited edition translucent Organiser II

users succumbing to the temptation to throw away their filofaxes, calculators and even watches in favour of the all-in-one Psion. A diary and alarm clock featured in all models, plus a world time utility in the LZ. The screen resolution had steadily increased, from one line on the Organiser, to two on the CM and XP, to four lines on the LZ, finally making such



The industrial HC...



...and the more recent Workabout

add-ons as a spreadsheet and a third-party word processor (AutoScribe) more practical.

In addition to the two 'Datapak' slots, each unit had a socket on the top for accessories such as a mains adaptor (especially recommended when writing to the datapaks, which required a hefty 21 volts to work), serial cable, bar code reader and telephone dialler. This extra expansion capability (and the legendary toughness) sent companies out in their droves to buy the Organiser II. Psion improved the concept in the HC and Workabout in later years, but have continued selling all three product lines for those companies that really want to buy them. One rarer Organiser II variant is the LA, which was an XP beefed up with more RAM. The machine was mainly sold in the USA and interestingly the LA stood for Los Angeles.

The great laptop disaster

1989 marked possibly the most significant turning point in the evolution of Psion's technology. Although not destined for huge sales, the A4-sized MC 400 was ground-breaking and years ahead of its time in many ways. Even today, in 1998, these machines are very saleable on the second-hand market and are either owned or remembered with affection by many Psion users.

Firstly, there was the new EPOC operating system, fully multi-tasking with a useable graphical user interface (remember, Microsoft had still not got Windows up and running at this time). An innovative touch pad provided control of the cursor (and other screen elements)—indeed it's relatively recently (almost ten years later) that PC notebook computers have caught onto the idea in a big way.

The MC's full-travel keyboard and reflective Supertwist-LCD display were outstanding, outshining many 1998 laptops for sheer usability. 256K of RAM and no less than four SSD slots provided (for the time) acres of solid state disk space, albeit at a price, since Psion's proprietary SSDs were sold at a very hefty premium. The format proved extremely robust over the next decade and these disks are still useable in today's Series 3mx. The cleverness of both EPOC and the hardware meant that the SSDs were 'hot-swappable', i.e. you could remove them without breaking the computer's stride, a feature which still looks advanced today.

Two docking bays at the back of the machine allowed the user to (in theory) add accessories such as modem, fax, bar code and card readers in wireless fashion within the overall form factor of the machine. Most impressive

No less than FOUR standard SSD slots on the MC range...

of all on the option list was a voice-compression module which made the claim of squeezing sound recordings down to an unbelievable 64K per eight minutes!

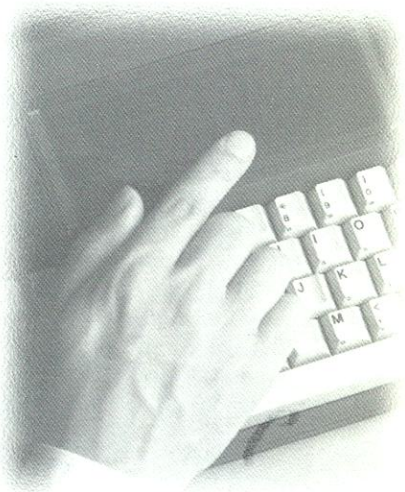
Even the power arrangements were well-appointed, especially when compared to the PC laptops of the same period. Two battery units were available, one with a rechargeable pack and one with room for eight AA batteries. Both gave the unit exceptional battery-life, measured in many tens of hours.

Ahead of its time

Although the built-in software (text editor, diary, calculator and database) seems spartan by Series 5 standards, it was very well conceived for the time, with Psion envisaging the MC's use as a portable workspace for business people and journalists. The only problem was that Psion's marketing department priced the MC400 accordingly, initially at £845. Although only a fraction of the price of PC notebooks of the same era, this starting price missed the mark on both fronts. The person in the street felt that £845 was too much for a glorified jotter and diary, while the corporate buyers (for whom price wasn't a big issue anyway) were swayed by the British press who expressed reservations about the MC's lack of PC compatibility.

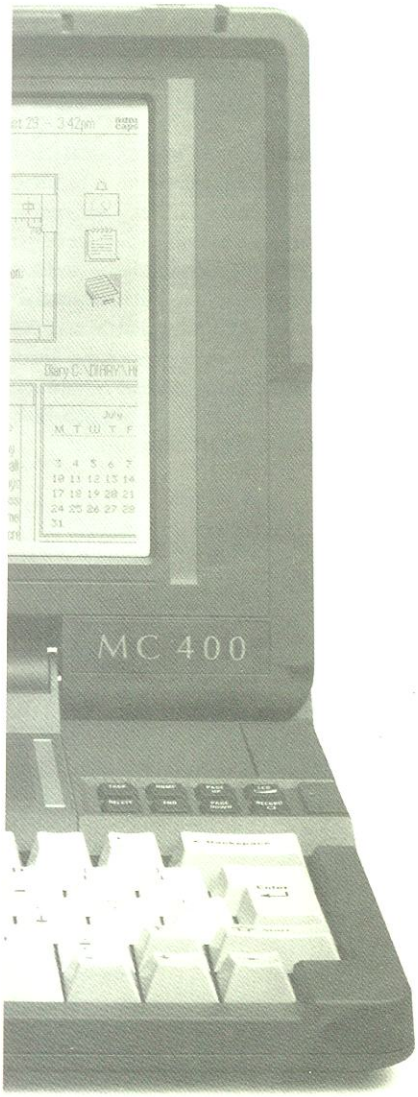
Going bust?

Perhaps unwisely, Psion took a swipe at the PC market as well, with the MC 600, a slightly tweaked MC 400 with 640K RAM, a 1MB internal disk and 256K of flash (containing MS-DOS 3.22). At roughly double the price of the already expensive MC 400, this hybrid machine was doomed right from the start, especially considering the poor state of PC software at the time (blocky 640x240 CGA graphics and a largely text-based interface). Between the two MC vari-



...and an innovative (in those days) touch-pad

ants, if rumours are to be believed, Psion very nearly went out of business. A nice anecdote now, but a very serious situation at the time.



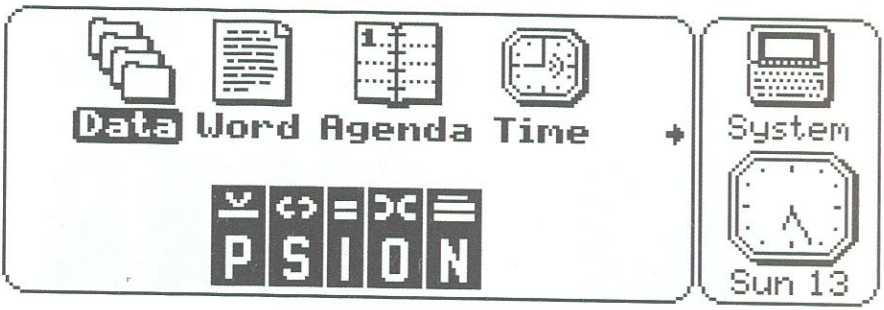
There were technical difficulties with the MC 400 too, despite (or perhaps because of) the overall level of innovation. The voice compression software and hardware failed to arrive at all and it wasn't until the Series 3a turned up in 1993 that anything remotely resembling Psion's 1989 claims became possible. Professional developers were hampered by a year's delay in the provision of a Software Development Kit (SDK) and hobbyist users became frustrated that the version of OPL provided was very restrictive and didn't allow construction of programs with the same look and feel as the internal applications. Moreover the latter weren't perfect either, and it was not until version two of EPOC appeared as a free upgrade late in 1990 that confidence in the platform was at least partially restored.

Pressing on with EPOC

Behind the scenes, of course, EPOC was being developed on all fronts. An industrial-strength word processor (designed to resemble Microsoft Word on the PC) was announced, firstly as part of the ROM on the brand new pocket-sized Series 3, and a few months later as a system upgrade for MC400 users (taking their machines up to 'MC-Word' level). Most importantly of all, the OPL language was being developed, with new graphics and dialog keywords designed so that for the first time a small home-made program could make use of most of the software resources in the ROM and thus appear as polished as Psion's 'C'-written applications.

The Series 3 phenomenon

September 1991 saw the official release of what was to become the biggest selling range in Psion's history. The small clam-shell Series 3 was launched to rave reviews,



A little 'blocky' by today's standards—the system screen of the original Series 3

although (as with several subsequent launches) consumers had a fairly long wait before significant numbers of reliable machines reached the shops. The price was right (£199 for the 128K, £249 for the 256K version), the form factor was right, and EPOC itself had now fully matured, with the inclusion of the brand new WORD and a complete rewrite of the old MC Diary application to come up with the AGENDA that we know and love. The Series 3 became the pocket computer that well over 100,000 people grew to love and depend on, eventually winding up with the official nickname of 'Classic'.

As with the MC range, it took a year for a proper C SDK to be released, but at least here every owner had the new OPL/G ('G' for Graphics) to play with, opening the floodgates for what was to become a veritable deluge of freeware and shareware programs for this and future EPOC palmtops.

The original Series 3, now known as the 'Classic'

The tip of the iceberg—commercial software for the Series 3

The runaway success of the '3' was instrumental in a complete rethink of the pricing strategy for the MC range, and by September 1992 the MC-Word was retailing at £395, a price it held right until its eventual withdrawal from the shops.

3...3a...3c...3mx

The name of the Series 3's successor was branded a misnomer by the press, many of whom felt that the extra screen area (four times as much), processor power (doubled) and upgraded software (SHEET now built in, digital sound and enhancements in all areas) warranted far more than a tacking of the letter 'a' onto the name. Whatever the label, the Series 3a became a massive hit (even at a 1993 launch price of £329 for the 512K version), clocking up huge sales over the next three years. Whereas certain applications (especially games) had been hard to implement properly on the small, blocky Series 3 screen, the overall 3a package was so well tuned that over 1500 third party programs were written for it, more than for any other similar computer before or since.

Adhering to the "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" adage, the next five years have seen a succession of detailed improvements within the overall theme. 1MB and 2MB memory models, the Series 3c variant with its infrared beaming, faster serial port and jotter software and now the speedy 3mx, all fall squarely within the same form factor and vision. In all, over 1.5 million Series 3-type machines have been sold worldwide, a number which is still increasing.

Series 3 lore

It's interesting to note that conspiracy theories abounded in 1996 when the Series 3c was launched. Amongst the other improvements a backlight was notable by its absence. Psion's official line was along the lines of "You don't really want a backlight, it would eat batteries and make the screen less distinct", a tack which only pacified users for a few days until they realised that S3c's bound for the USA *did* include a backlight. "Ah", said Psion, "We had to do that because Americans wouldn't buy a model without a backlight". Most European users promptly turned round and said "Then neither shall we!" and communications quickly became rather heated. There was only one way that Psion were going to win this one, and after a few months they introduced the backlit model to users on this side of the Atlantic.

And then straight to FIVE...

Nothing's ever quiet for long in the computer world, though, with July 1997 seeing Psion launching the 'next generation' Series 5 at £499 for the 8MB model. No-one knows for sure what happened to the Series 4. One theory suggests that the tiny Siena (a half-size model designed mainly for organiser use, launched at the same time as the Series 3c) was really the '4' in disguise. Other people have pointed out that the spoken word "Four" carries unpleasant associations in Chinese and Japanese languages. The Series 5 has been received with enthusiasm and has won many press awards over the past year, despite niggling problems with screen contrast and reliability.

New style, new operating system—the Series 5

Symbian and beyond

And so to the future. The Symbian association with major phone manufacturers (see editorial and news sections of issue 19) should make EPOC a real force on the world stage and perhaps one day bring Psion back full circle to being primarily a software company. Meanwhile, if the folks at Psion and Symbian are reading this, I'm still waiting for 'Flight Simulation' for the Series 5...

Special thanks to Steve Pang at Psion, John Boyce and Mike O'Regan, all of whom helped in the research for this article. Note also that all prices given were official recommended retail prices, quoted in UK Sterling, including Value Added Tax.

Working For a Living - The Doctor

The latest in our new series looking at how Psion palmtops are used in real-life situations

Dr Perkins' initial joy at finding his Psion is tempered somewhat by the impending medical negligence suit...
Look on the bright side - he used to have a laptop...

Graphic by Shane McKee, created using SKETCH on a Series 5

by Dr Shane McKee

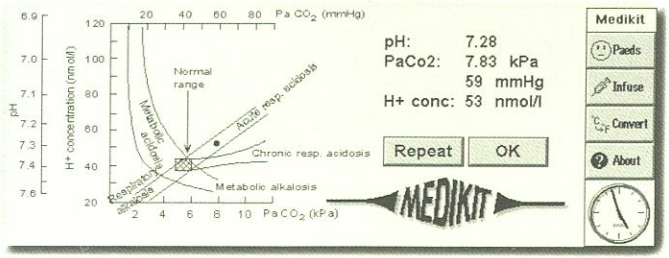
Doctor Doctor!

Looking at the stethoscope, pens, pen-torches, bleep, tendon hammer and various other medical accoutrements poking out of my white coat pocket, the little old lady in Ward two raised her eyebrows.

"Next thing you'll tell me is that you've got your computer in there!" she laughed.

"Well, actually," I said, drawing my trusty 3a from my side and flipping it open, ready to enter her details, "I do!"

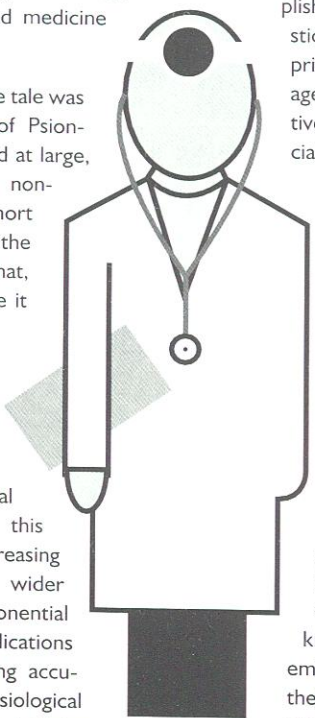
If the shock had converted her heartbeat back into a regular rhythm, and she had been totally cured of atrial fibrillation and fit to go home the next day, this would have been a great story and probably a useful marketing anecdote for Psion. Sadly it was not to be.



A Psion palmtop—the doctor's friend

"Well, my goodness!" she said, and her heartbeat continued irregularly as before, wiggling its way along the monitor screen above her bed. Happily we managed to get her sorted out using good old-fashioned medicine and she remains well.

Anyway, the point of that little tale was to introduce the concept of Psion-carrying doctors to the world at large, and to ease the medic and non-medic alike into this short overview of some of the programs and documents that, you never know, might make it into the next series of ER.

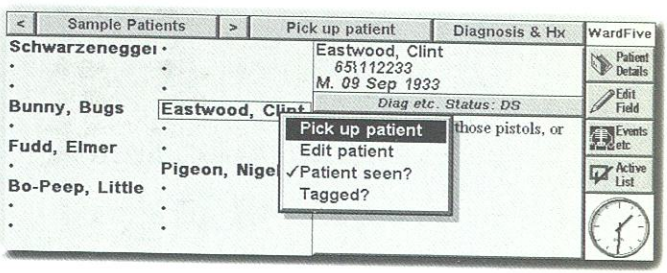


Palmtops (the computers *and* the magazine) are becoming increasingly popular amongst people in the medical profession. I don't find this surprising because of the increasing complexity of medicine: a wider knowledge base, an exponential increase in the medications prescribed and the increasing accuracy of defining various physiological attributes. This has meant that during the past 10 to 20 years the numbers of books being stuffed into those already crowded white coat pockets has proliferated.

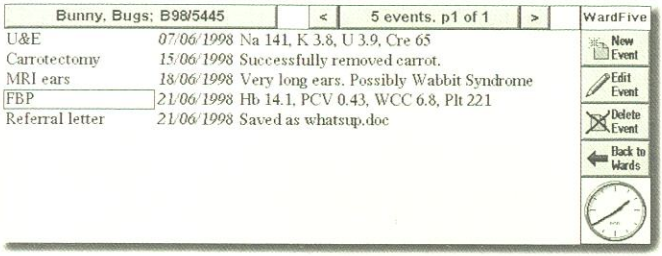
Your life in their palmtops

Junior hospital doctors need to keep a careful track of their patients, and most accomplish this with paper notebooks and sticky labels with patient details printed on them. In this day and age, such a process is comparatively messy and inefficient, especially since Psion came on the scene.

The built-in applications are impressively adaptable for medical use. The most obvious use of DATA is to collect information about your patients (name, DOB, diagnosis, reference numbers, etc.), but many people keep databases for such things as drug doses, disease descriptions and perhaps even a hospital's phone directory. Series 5-owning surgeons have been known to use SKETCH to embed anatomical pictures into their database of surgical procedures performed (a requirement for surgeons in training). AGENDA, as you'd expect, is as useful as ever in maintaining a diary of appointments and to-do list items, with WORD (especially



Some improbable patients in good hands in WardFive


Bunny, Bugs; B98/5445
<
5 events. p1 of 1
>
WardFive
U&E 07/06/1998 Na 141, K 3.8, U 3.9, Cre 65
Carrotectomy 15/06/1998 Successfully removed carrot.
MRI ears 18/06/1998 Very long ears. Possibly Wabbit Syndrome
FBP 21/06/1998 Hb 14.1, PCV 0.43, WCC 6.8, Plt 221
Referral letter 21/06/1998 Saved as whatsup.doc
New Event
Edit Event
Delete Event
Back to Wards

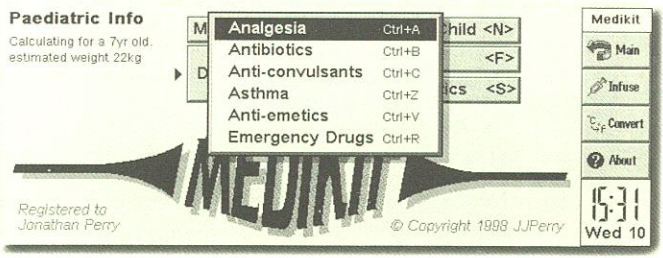
Details for an awkward patient in WardFive

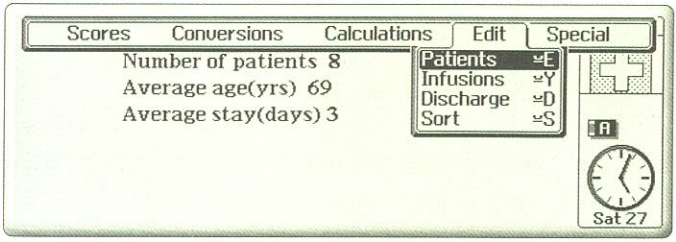
on the '5') being perfect for viewing and searching medical reference texts.

The easy learning curve of OPL has brought about an explosion in third party software recently, all written by doctors like myself, initially for our own use and later released for others' benefit. My own *WardRound* (for the Series 3 range and Siena) started life as a little aid to help me on my paediatric rounds. It evolved, and the current incarnation of *WardFive* for the Series 5 is an advanced Patient Information Manager, incorporating tagging, search, and pick-up/drop facilities in a unique ward-based arrangement. This layout allows you to see an overview of a particular ward, including slots corresponding to individual beds, into which you can enter patient details. The big advantage of this approach is that it is much more brain-friendly than conventional list-based patient databases. The program also allows printing of discharge letters and handover lists, as well as a host of other features, and has been very well received by doctors. There are 60 virtual wards, each supporting a maximum of 60 patients. Bed crisis? What bed crisis?

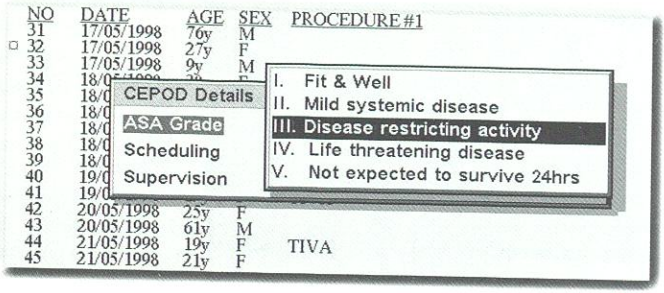
MedPalm is a program for Series 3 machines for logging all sorts of patient information.

Just some of MediKit's useful features





Medmate running on a Series 3a



Chronicling the medical day with AnaeLOG

Specifically geared for outpatient use in private practice, it looks like an impressive piece of programming, although the price (over $300!) is well out of the range of most junior doctors. The Series 5 version appears to have been placed on hold at present.

How long have I got, doc?

Another great thing about having a Psion on the wards is the ability to perform those tedious little calculations which, although simple, are a real problem at 3:15am. There are loads of simple '.OPO' programs which calculate body mass index, but most of them suffer from one basic flaw: they're a pain in the head to use.

That's why *MediKit* on the Series 5 is such a useful and mould-breaking tool. It combines a conversion utility with a paediatric drug dose calculator, clinical scoring systems and more. It blows any competing program out of the water, with over 100 medical calculations and assessments. There is a simple, if non-standard, dialog interface and results are clearly presented.

MedMate performs a similar rôle for the Series 3 as well, but with a more adult-oriented emphasis. The Series 3 version also includes a patient manager.

Resources

The Data Protection Registrar Homepage: *www.dpr.gov.uk*

Shane McKee's 'Psion General Hospital' (*WardFive*, *WardRound*, assorted medical software, links): *dnausers.d-n-a.net/psionmed*

David Henshaw (*Medmate*, links): *www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~dhenshaw/*

Jonathan Perry (*MediKit*): *www.homeusers.prestel.co.uk/perry*

Jim Berrington (*AnaeLOG*): *www.homeusers.prestel.co.uk/berrington*

Publistix (*MedPalm*): *www.publistix.com*

SCATA (basic anaesth. log): *www.scata.org.uk/programs/list.html*

Most of the items mentioned in the article are also on the Palmtop CDs.

Useful spreadsheets

Although the above are dedicated applications, there are several spreadsheets available to help you with difficult calculations. My own *Centiles* sheet includes graphs and tables for childhood growth curves, along with an estimator of body surface area and peak flow rate, making it very useful in a paediatric clinic. *Resus* gives the dose-by-weight of several drugs important in paediatric emergency care. P J Buxton's beautifully-formatted *Obstetric_calc* sheet is a joy to use for working out when babies are due, and arranging your on-call for some other night...

Weighty tomes

Of course doctors don't know everything (despite carefully-cultured pretences to the contrary), and occasionally they need to hit the books. On the ward or in an emergency situation this can be difficult, which is why many doctors carry handbooks, paper notebooks, protocol sheets and the like, stuffed into their white coat pockets and flapping in the breeze like sheaves during harvest. It's a terrible waste of trees, not to mention the energy required to tote all this around and the time taken to access it. A palmtop, on the other hand, is the ideal emergency information retrieval system.

Several useful databases are available, such as Len Funk's collection of Orthopaedics and Anatomy snippets, available for both EPOC 16 and 32. Jason Wolfe has created a database of drugs from the British National Formulary, as well as another which lists all the muscles in the human body. Even with these and other efforts, there is a need for more good-quality public domain databases for use on the Psion.

The Data Protection Act (1984)

Any doctor who is wishing to use their Psion for the purpose of storing patient data (and let's face it, that's all of us) needs to be very sure that he or she is complying with the terms of the Data Protection Act. (If you don't practise in the UK, a similar piece of legislation will probably apply wherever you live.) This Act was brought into force to ensure that personal data stored on computers were not misused and that confidentiality was protected. It applies to all users of computerised personal data, and not just health care workers.

All hospital trusts in the UK have a Data Protection Policy, and are registered with the Data Protection Registrar, whose job is to oversee the whole process. Part of that policy will include permission to use computers for patient administration. Doctors and nurses are usually covered as 'Data Users' in these policies, permitting them to manipulate this data.

Before entering any patient's personal data on a palmtop for work-related purposes, I would strongly advise a doctor to confirm with the hospital's Data Protection Officer that this is permitted under the Hospital Trust's registration. Even then it is important that any data relating to patients is protected with a password, and preferably encrypted.

Captain's log

Junior hospital doctors are required to keep a log of all the activities they have undertaken, and experience gained, as part of their training. At the end of each assessment period (usually a year) they have to show how they have done. There are some fairly basic log programs available from SCATA, the Society for Computing and Technology in Anaesthesia for the Series 3, but SCATA were very slow off the mark with a Series 5 version and *AnaeLOG* is the current leader in this field. It's intended to make an activity log easy and is geared for anaesthetists. *AnaeLOG* is fairly straightforward in terms of data capture, and allows output of reports and recording of critical incidents, making it a useful tool for audit purposes as well as for training. It's author is also responsible for *EZPaeDZ*, a drug dose calculator for babies and children.

And finally

I've deliberately focused on hospital medicine in this article. That's because the vast majority of Psion medical software has been written by hospital doctors. Many of the above resources will however also be applicable in General Practice, so don't be surprised if the first thing out of your GP's black bag is a Psion rather than a stethoscope!

Thanks to David Henshaw, Jim Berrington, Jonathan Perry and Steve Litchfield for their help in preparing this article.

Shane McKee is currently a Specialist Registrar in Clinical Genetics in Birmingham, and is involved in maintaining the web page for the British Society for Human Genetics.

FOR SALE

Series 3c (2MB) in good condition with leather case - £160, PsiWin with cable - £45, 2MB flash SSD - £70, Financial Calculator on SSD - £15. All boxed with manuals.

Contact: Rowan Healey on 0181 5043658
Email: rowan-healey@email.msn.com

PSION Series 5 (8MB), with 24MB CF card, lots of software (incl. PsiWin and MacConnect), mains adaptor, smart leather case. All in original boxes, as new, hardly used - £450 ono.

Contact: Will on 01458 833864
Email: willparfitt@dial.pipex.com

Citizen PN601 printer with NiCad batter and Macintosh link, hardly used - £320.

Contact: 01703 907191
Email: sbuddprint@aol.com

Series 5 (8MB) with leather case/mains adaptor/2spare wands. Unwanted gift, unused, unregistered in original packing - £350 the lot.

Contact: Allen Goldenberg 01702 342201/347738 0802 770316
Email: allen@anfield.freeserve.co.uk

Psion Travel Modem, PsiFax and Route Planner for Germany/Austria/Benelux on SSD. All sensible prices considered.

Contact: Paul Mayell +49 2225 5413 (Germany)
Email: ibis@ibis-school.com

THREE for all

Steve Litchfield examines some highlights from the Series 3 world

The launch of the triple-speed 3mx brings even more scope to the classic Psion design, as although the Series 3's strength has always been its ability as a personal digital assistant, there were tasks which it handled in a more cumbersome fashion. The faster processor is aimed at tackling the latter without compromising the former.

Internet oomph...

Possibly the biggest gain is when using the 3mx with a fast modem and PsiMail Internet. Not only do web pages and graphics download more quickly, but decoding of GIF images is much faster and web sites at last start to appear at the same sort of speed as when viewed on a desktop computer.

More gaming power

Most Psion owners get rightly annoyed when bystanders assume that just because they're tapping away at an electronic device they must be playing a game. The trouble is, though, that sometimes we *are* playing games on our favourite palmtop. The 3mx will make more adventurous arcade games possible, with faster graphics and more frequent screen updates. Perhaps first-person 3D adventures or even basic flight simulators will see the light of day? We live in hope.

One other area where extra speed has been sorely needed is route finding software. Both AutoRoute Express and En Route slow to a crawl when asked to calculate journeys of moderate length, and reducing the calculation time from 30 seconds to 10 seconds is a major time-saver when you're itching to be on your way.

The 3mx helps solve another long-term niggle of mine in SHEET. Not only can cell recalculation take ages on a 3a/3c, but inserting and deleting rows and columns can sometimes run into minutes. The new processor substantially reduces these delays and will cheer many folks' financial ruminations.

'mx', maestro?

Although there's no evidence yet to support this hope, one thing I'd like to see, given the fast processor and serial port, is some *serious* music software. The 3mx would make the composition process graphical and instant (a musical ear permitting) and the serial port would easily feed MIDI information to all the various modern music tools. Tunes and

arrangements could be worked on while on the move, ready for analysis and downloading when back at base.

Reflecting on the above, it might seem that I've been unhappy with the performance of the 3a and 3c in the past. On the contrary, I hadn't even thought of most of these points until the 3mx popped its case above the horizon. But faced with the chance of acquiring one, the correct response for most of us is "Yes, please".

The evolution of the 'three'

As an avid follower of the Psion-compatible world over the last five years, it's been fascinating to watch the development of the hardware design used in the Series 3 range. From the early Series 3 'Classics', which had horrendous reliability problems (one South American dealer was reputed to have sent back an entire shipment of 100 machines because *every one* was faulty), the quality of build and design has improved markedly over the years.

With the 3mx the hardware package is fully mature, all niggles and worries having been worked out of the basic design during development of the 3a and 3c. Although there's always the thought that perhaps we should be right on the cutting edge of technology, it's a fact that this is where people experience the most grief. By hanging back and sticking with the proven Series 3 design (yet with a fast and efficient modern processor), you're able to get on with life without constantly worrying about whether your palmtop is going to crash or die a horrible death the next day. If I had to pick any palmtop computer to take with me into the wilds on an exploratory expedition, the 3mx would surely be the best choice.

Taking the 3mx on expedition—hey, I can explore wherever I choose!

The new gunmetal-grey finish is so much more practical than the 3c's 'rubberised' coat, which tended to show up every fingerprint. And it's far more durable than the Series 5's thin matt black paint. While we're here, I think it's even better than the smooth paint job of the original 3a, which tended to make for the odd slippery accident.

No more broken cables

The infamous 'broken battery lead' syndrome on the older Series 3 machines was banished with the 3c, which used a slender ribbon cable to do the same job, and the 3mx retains this arrangement. Enough years have also passed since the 3a-to-3c switch that the 'Honda' (flat, keyed) connector is now by far the most common Psion cable format, so of course the 3mx uses it as well. This means that fortunate users with two or more palmtops (Siena, 3mx or Series 5) can use the same cable for each, saving a lot of scrabbling around at the back of home PCs.

Watch that connector!

A word of warning to those switching often between 3c/3mx and Series 5: be careful to get the flat connector the right way round. A Psion dealer was telling me the other day of several horror stories where users didn't realise that the two machines accept the connector the opposite way round (the Series 5 needs it with the metal side up). Attempting to force in the keyed plastic against its natural inclination is a recipe for disaster and will probably write off both cable and serial port, necessitating a repair by Psion. If in doubt, examine the connector and port closely and note which way round the bevelled centre section needs to go.

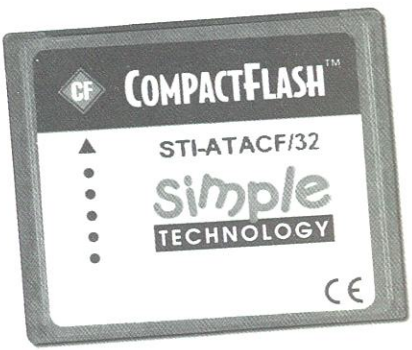
The faster processor speed on the 3mx was in many ways very beneficial to Psion, as the new, re-engineered motherboard is actually cheaper to produce than the old one. They do seem to have taken this cost-cutting exercise a little too far, though, with the 3mx being made of a slightly flimsier plastic than the old range. Although I've no reason as *yet* to suspect that the new density isn't strong *enough*, care has to be taken when closing the SSD doors to make sure that they shut cleanly and don't wander up or down and miss their catch.

My own recommendation...

Having read the review of the 3mx on page 24, I have to say that I concur. The 3mx is so good that I went out and bought one (yes, with my own money) to replace my trusty three year old 2MB 3a. If your Series 3 is as old (or older) than this, you should definitely consider upgrading as well. The 3mx is actually so satisfying to use that I even considered moving my 'master' customer lists and AGENDA from my Series 5, but until Psion release software capable of actually doing this 'backwards' conversion without losing information, this is not an option.

Do you remember when you first got your Series 3 and spent many a happy moment opening and closing it while watching the button-bar mechanism from the side? The 'wow' factor is still there (even if you've not done it for a while)—try it and see. Six years on, I still think the over-centre clamshell design with 'disappearing icons' is a modern design classic. Own yours with pride!

WIN a FREE 4MB flash SSD or 32MB CompactFlash!!



Whether you're a Series 3a/3c/3mx or Series 5 user, you can expand the capacity of your Psion computer by winning either a Psion 4MB flash SSD or a Simple Technology 32MB CompactFlash—you choose which prize you want.

Just answer the three questions (below), and send your answers on a postcard to Palmtop Publications, PO Box 188, Bicester, Oxfordshire OX6 0GP, ENGLAND.

We can only accept entries by postcard, and all postcards must be clearly labelled COMPETITION 20. Any entries received by means other than postcard will be discarded.

All entries must reach us by 30th November 1998, and the winner will be notified on the following day.

Question 1: How many SSD slots are there in an MC 400?

Question 2: What is the speed of the Series 3mx processor?

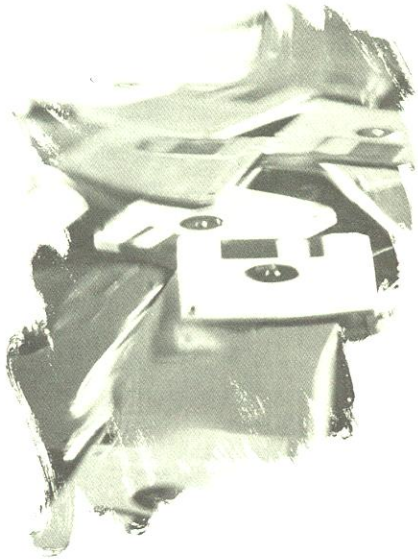
Tie breaker: If you were running Psion, what single thing would you do differently? *(The most interesting or humorous answer will be chosen. Answers to be judged by the Palmtop editorial panel, and all decisions are final.)*

Last issue's winner: Mr M James, Erith, Kent

EPOC in the RAW?

Do you REALLY need all that add-on software for your Series 5?

by Roger Pemburton



I feel I ought to apologise in advance to authors of the myriad of Series 5 utilities and enhancements. Although I've no doubt their masterpieces perform genuinely useful functions, there are times when a simpler approach pays dividends...

Spoilt for choice

Have you ever walked into a large bookshop or CD store and felt overwhelmed? Somehow the extra choice of all those full shelves has the opposite effect than you'd expect—there's so much available that you don't know where to start, and a small back street shop would actually suit you better as you could be fairly confident of seeing everything in it. I feel a bit like that with the Series 5 software scene at the moment. Just because your Extras bar is chock-full doesn't necessarily mean that you're working productively, and bigger gains can often be made by making more effective use of what you've already got.

Despite being largely happy with the way the machine works right out of the box, I find myself bombarded with utilities, macros, shortcuts and file managers, all designed to save those precious few seconds of time. In fact, many of them require so much attention and setting up that it's quicker to use the built-in functionality and accept a few more keystrokes.

The big turn-on

Some examples might help here. Two popular utility functions are to display the current battery status and to turn the backlight on when the machine is switched on. In each case, is it *really* worth the hassle of installing a utility and remembering to restart it after every single backup? The Series 5 itself warns you if the batteries get very low and if you need further reassurance then [Ctrl]-[Shift]-[p] is only a second away. So-called 'Night-light' utilities are also generally more trouble than they're worth, coming on when you don't need them. Is [Fn]-[space] really that hard to do on the one or two occasions per day when you need the backlight on?

Time savers?

Macro and short-cut utilities seem to be all the rage at the moment. Is it me, or are many of these just the 'Emperor's new clothes'? What is the point of a shortcut to a program which already has its own icon on the Extras bar? Ah, I hear you say, "But what about shortcuts to often-used documents?" Most users find that they tend to keep all their main documents in a single folder 'tree', one folder per project. So why not just use the Series 5 'Bookmark' facility to jump straight to one level above these project folders? [Ctrl]-[b], the initial letter of the required folder and then that of the required file and [Enter] will do the job nicely, taking a grand total of around three seconds. Given that it typically takes a minimum of 15 minutes to set up a 'short cut' utility with all your most-used documents, and that even the shortcut will take at least a second to work, you'd have to use the shortcut system over 450 times to get any *real* net time saving. And you have to remember to restart the utility after backups, make new entries for new documents and so forth, meaning that in reality you'll never catch up at all.

Macros are also popular with computer users. But how many times have you set up a macro and then either forgotten its hot-key, or even that you'd set it up *at all*? Any macro that's not used daily will be difficult to remember in a crunch.

Files and folders?

Another recent trend has been file managers, with *Navigator*, *RMRFile*, *Filer*, *3T* and so on. But unless I'm missing something the Series 5 system screen is a very competent file manager itself, with file and folder selection (hold [Shift] or [Ctrl] while you tap), moving ([Ctrl]-[x]), copying ([Ctrl]-[c]) and deleting ([Del]). With *Message Suite* installed you can even now tap on text files to load them into WORD directly, and tricks like [Ctrl]-[q] to flick between disk drives make navigation even faster than the dedicated file managers.

Mightier than the sword?

I'm afraid pen entry systems just make me laugh. Let me see—would I rather use the Series 5's superb 60-word-per-minute built-in keyboard, or pay £40-£50 for a utility that lets me enter text six times slower using a pen which I have to get out specially, and which increases the risk of scratch damage to the delicate touch-screen? Hmm—that's a difficult one...

Even utilities which seem genuinely useful on the face of it, providing ready reckoner and conversion functions, are really just alternatives to storing the same data or formulae in the built-in applications, and with some of the SHEET and DATA files from the excellent *www.pocketinfo.org* it's now possible to run an entire business without going near a third party program at all.

Taking stock

Minimising your dependence on third party utilities also pays dividends when using a friend's Series 5 or when handling disaster in the shape of a Psion failure. With all your expertise based around the software in the ROM, you can be productive within seconds of turning on the new machine.

By reconsidering what's on your '5' and what you ***really*** need, you may be able to save money, disk space, time and battery power. 'Power users' will of course hotly contest everything I've written here, but most casual users should seriously consider taking the simple approach.

How to connect your Psion to the Internet

by Pete Sipple

The fourth and final part of our beginners' guide to setting up your Series 3 or Series 5 for email and World Wide Web access

In this final instalment we'll tie up a few loose ends, look at speeding up your surfing, and walk you through sending the first email.

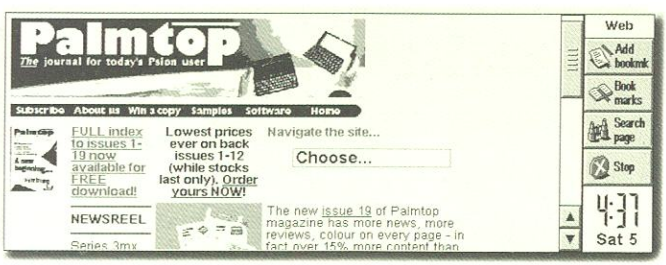
Surfing the web

All being well, you have now been able to make your first connection. By entering the address of *www.palmtop.co.uk* you should have seen our web page as shown below.

By scrolling up and down, you'll have found links to other web pages. You can easily identify links, as they are usually underlined. Tap on a link twice, and you'll be taken off to another page. Once you've had a good look around our site, follow the link to our 'Hotlinks' area. That will take you to a list of other Psion-related sites. Make sure you check out Psion's web site *www.psion.com*, and Steve Litchfield's excellent 3-Lib (*3lib.ukonline.co.uk*).

Here are a few tips for happy surfing:

- **Bookmarks** – If you find a page you may want to return to, 'Bookmark' it. From the menu, select 'Bookmark current page'. You can then return quickly to that page from any point.
- **Save it** – If you've found an interesting page with lots of text, don't forget that you're paying for your online time while you read it. If you want to be frugal, either save the page or disconnect if you're going to be staying on the same one for more than a couple of minutes.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The new issue 19 of Palmtop magazine has more news, more reviews, colour on every page - in fact over 15% more content than
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Book marks
Search page
Stop
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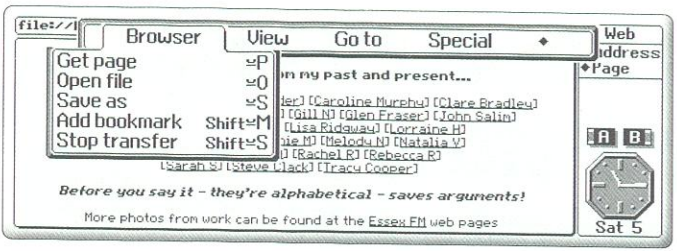
Sat 5

The Palmtop website, as viewed on a Series 5



Remember to 'bookmark' your favourite sites!

- **Make it fast** – On the Series 5, from the 'Tools' menu, turn off animations and switch to four colour mode. You'll navigate faster.

- **And even faster** – Another cost-saving measure is to turn the images off altogether. The pages will generally look less impressive, but new pages will load a lot quicker. Experiment with working image-free, and remember that there is a 'load all images' option on the Series 5 [Ctrl]-[i] if you want to check out the current page's images.

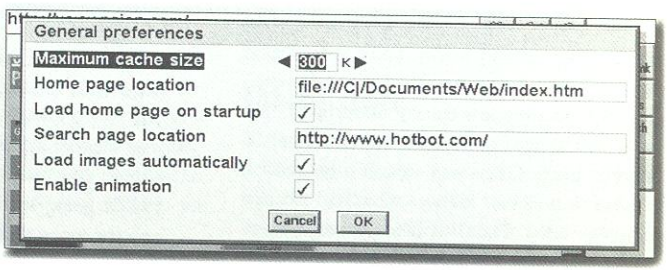
Using email

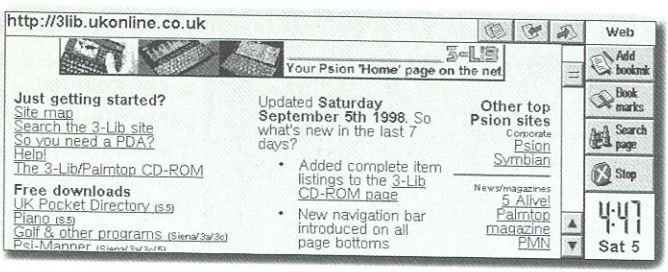
In the last issue we entered all of the necessary information into the software in order to get the email package working, and if you've been following the previous instalments you should now be in a position to send your first email. Before you get tapping, here's a run-through of the basics:

Folders

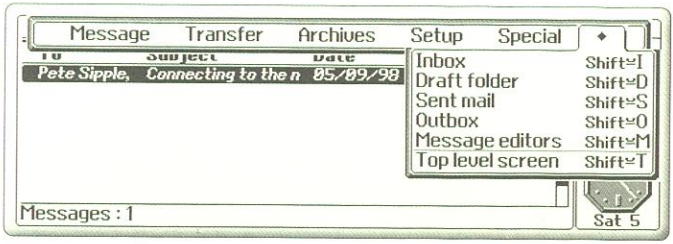
Both PsiMail Internet and Message Suite work on the 'Inbox / Outbox' principle. Your software will have four main 'folders' for storing various types of email:

Setting up your Surfing on the Series 5...





Check out the 3-lib site!



The mail folders on a Series 3a

- **Inbox** – This is where your new incoming email will be stored.
- **Outbox** – Messages you've written will be stored here, waiting to be sent when you are next connected.
- **Draft** – If you are halfway through typing a message, you can save it here to return to later, before moving it to the Outbox.
- **Sent** – By default, copies of messages that you have written and sent will be placed here for future reference.

Working offline

All of your messages are stored 'offline', which means that you won't be able to send new messages or check for post until you are online (connected). When you do get online, you transfer all messages to your ISP and collect any incoming mail that's waiting.

Addressing

When typing an email address into the software it's important to get it *exactly* right, or it will be 'bounced' back to you by your service provider. There are some specific rules regarding how addresses should be typed:

- An email address *must not* contain any spaces, and is normally written in lower case.
- There must be an '@' (meaning 'at') symbol somewhere within the address.
- There must be no punctuation at the end of the address (no full stop or period!)
- The address must not contain any commas, colons, brackets or quotes.
- Valid addresses look like this: *info@palmtop.co.uk* , *help@msn.com* or *petesipple@aol.com*

Return address

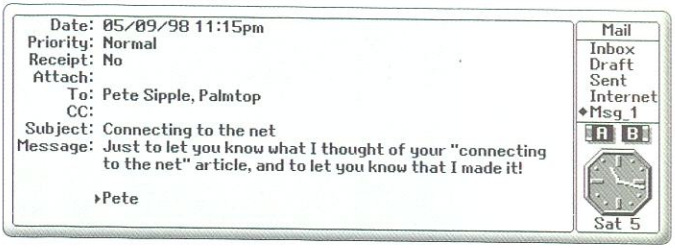
When you set up email details from the last issue, you would have been asked to enter your own email address. When sending emails your return address is automatically quoted on each message, so you don't have to type it in each time, and people know how to reply to you—assuming that you entered your own email address correctly.

Your first email

Now we've covered the basics, let's get on with sending your first email. If you have a colleague or friend, then ask for their email address and use them as your guinea pig for the first message. If you don't know anyone with email, you're welcome to send a test directly to me. My email address is:

petesipple@aol.com

Another good way of testing your email setup is to send a message to yourself. The message should get back to you almost instantly, as it's being sent on a short journey to your ISP and



A message ready to be sent from a Series 3c

back. If the message gets back to you then all's well. If not, you need to check through the mail settings supplied by your ISP (see page 77 of issue 19).

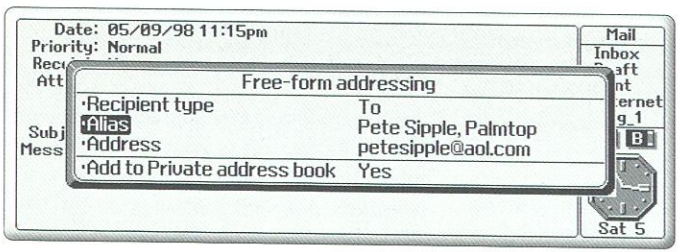
Sending email on a Series 3

- Open the 'Mail' application from your system screen.
- Select 'New Message'.
- You should now be at the screen which lets you compose an email. Move down to the 'To:' line, and press [Psion]-[f]. This lets you add a 'free form' address, rather than selecting one from your (empty) address book. Once you've added some addresses you'll be able to select them directly from your address book, rather than typing them in long-hand each time.
- Type in the 'alias', which is the person's name, e.g. 'Joe Smith', and then the 'address',e.g. *joesmith@compuserve.com* .
- In the subject field, put a short description, e.g. 'Test message'.
- Type a message in the message field.
- Press [Psion]-[s] to move your message to the outbox.

You should now see your message waiting to be sent from the Outbox. Press [Esc] to get to the main PsiMail screen, and select 'Transfer Mail'. This will connect to the Internet and deliver your message. If you have any messages waiting for you, it will place them in your Inbox.

Sending email on a Series 5

- Tap 'Extras', and select 'Email'.
- Tap the 'New' toolbar button.
- Select 'Email'.
- You should now be at the 'New email message' screen. Move down to the 'To:' line, and type the email address, e.g. *joesmith@compuserve.com* .



Entering an email address on PsiMail Internet

Composing mail on a Series 5

- In the subject field, put a short description, e.g. 'Test message'.
- Type a message in the large blank box.
- When you've finished, tap the 'Save–Outbox' button on your toolbar.

On the left of the screen are the folders. Tap on 'Outbox' and you should see your message waiting to be sent. Now press the 'Send' button on the toolbar. This will connect to the Internet and deliver your message.

Collecting your mail on a Series 3

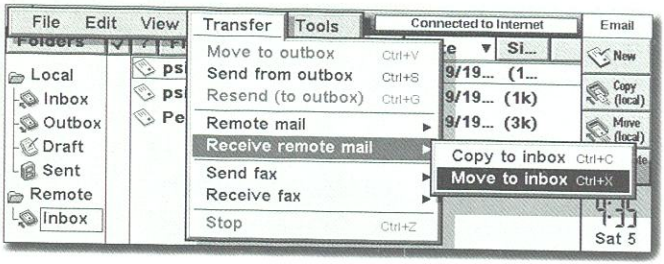
- Open the 'Mail' application from the system screen.
- Making sure your modem is connected correctly, and tap on 'Transfer Mail'. Your modem will dial and collect the mail, as well as sending any messages waiting in your Outbox.
- Once the transfer is complete, you will get a message summarising how many messages were sent and/or received. Now tap the 'Inbox' to see your mail.
- Any messages you haven't read yet are shown in bold type. Move the cursor to your message and press [Enter].

If you want to reply to the message, use [Psion]-[r].

Collecting your mail on a Series 5

- Tap the Extras button, and select 'Email'.
- Tap the 'Remote mail' toolbar button.
- Select 'Open mailbox'.
- On the right-hand side of the screen, a list should appear showing any messages waiting to be collected from your ISP.
- Before you can read the messages, you must copy them onto your machine. You can choose to leave the messages at your ISP and just take a copy (handy if you

A message waiting in my inbox



Getting mail from your ISP

access your email from your PC too), or move them from your ISP to your Psion, thus deleting the copy stored on the ISP's server. With your pen, tap on the messages you want to read. A tick symbol will appear in front of each item.

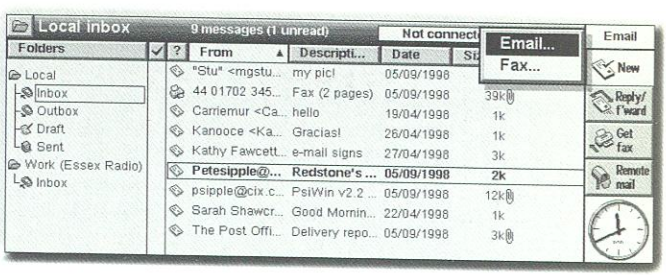
- From the toolbar, or from the 'Transfer' menu, choose to either 'Copy' or 'Move' items to your Inbox.
- If you haven't done so already, disconnect from the Internet with [Ctrl]-[u].
- Tap on the 'Inbox' to read your mail.

Hints:

- Remember to keep your folders tidy. The 'Sent items' folder is the first candidate for a periodic clearout.
- When viewing folders on a Series 5, try zooming out to see more on screen—with lots of messages, it makes a difference.
- Experiment with 'sorting' your emails – either by date received, by file size, or by 'To/From'. Use either 'Tools | Sort by' on the 5, or 'Special | Set Preferences | Sort Preferences' with PsiMail Internet.
- Keep your address book up-to-date. [Shift]-[Psion]-[b] takes you to it on a Series 3. On a Series 5 tap on the 'Address' button on the 'New email' screen.

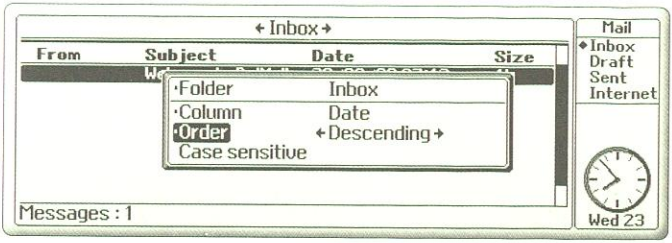
Troubleshooting

Connecting to the Internet can sometimes be frustrating. If you're using a Psion Travel Modem and a large ISP it's normally plain sailing, but factors such as an unhelpful ISP, a noisy phone line or a quirky modem can make your surfing hard work. If you're having problems connecting with PsiMail Internet, you might like to refer to the problem-solving feature starting from page 35 in issue 12. You can also try the pointers below:



One emboldened (unread) message on my Series 5

Get it sorted!



Can't connect?

If you're having problems getting connected, check your modem setup. The default options should be sufficient, but if not, take note of the settings under 'Communications | Port Settings' (Series 3's 'Setup' icon under the 'Mail' icon on the system screen), or 'Control Panel | Modem | Edit | Handshaking' (from the Series 5 system screen). Try setting your Baud rate down to '9600' and altering the handshaking. If in doubt, set XON/OFF to 'Off', RTS/CTS to 'On' and experiment with your DSR/DTR and DCD settings. Also remember to make sure that your PC link is switched off and that you're not trying to use infrared (system screen, [Psion]-[I] or [Ctrl]-[I]) at the same time.

If you can't connect at all or get 'Communication error' reported, you may have a problem with your connecting cables. You may also be trying to connect without our friend, the null-modem adaptor.

Log-on problems?

This is most likely related to your user name, password or provider settings. Check all of your details carefully (see last issue), and don't be afraid to call your ISP's helpdesk if you're stuck. The other cause of problems could be your script. These are tricky little things, so if you're having problems then try connecting manually by disabling the script, and either contact your ISP or ask other Psion users.

A good tip from Jochen Siegenthaler's site (see last issue for the address) is for Series 5 users to check out the log file for clues to connection problems. You can force Message Suite to generate a log file by creating the folder C:\Logs\NetDial\, where a file called NETDIAL.TXT will be created. Look in there—use either WORD or PROGRAM and import the file as text, and you will see what the scripts are doing.

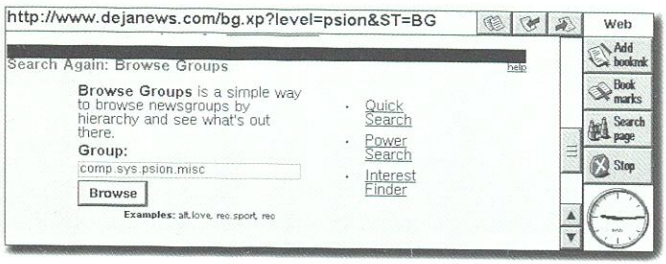
Losing connection?

Try a slower speed, and also try turning on the DCD option in 'Handshaking' (see above). 'Call Waiting' services or picking up your telephone handset will also disrupt the link.

What's next?

If you've made it online, you should be able to send email and browse the web. Here are a few other things to try while online:

Searching. From the browser, try one of the search engines. These will allow you to search the web for keywords. Try either *www.hotbot.com* or *www.excite.com* and type in a word. The word 'Symbian' finds 155 matches, whilst a topical word such as 'Lewinsky' finds over 19,000 matches. Whatever your interest, there are pages and pages of stuff out there for you. Give it a try!



Using DejaNews

Software. Avid *Palmtop* readers should know all about shareware: it's cheap, of excellent quality, and plentiful. Start with sites like 3-Lib and *www.nwt.com* and download the software you've seen in *Palmtop*. If you're not sure how it all works, see 'What is Shareware' on page 19, and 'The Installation Game' back in issues 14 and 15.

Newsgroups. 'On The Net' (see page 98) takes a look at what Psion users are discussing worldwide—you can take part too. A program called *NewsReader* is under development, and will ultimately allow to you read 'news' on your Series 5. Until it is released, you can connect to a 'newsreader' via the web. Type in the address *www.dejanews.com*, select 'Browse Groups' and try *comp.psion.sys.misc*, or just try searching for a Psion-related subject, like PsiMail. Once you've found your way around, talk to other users and look out for tips.

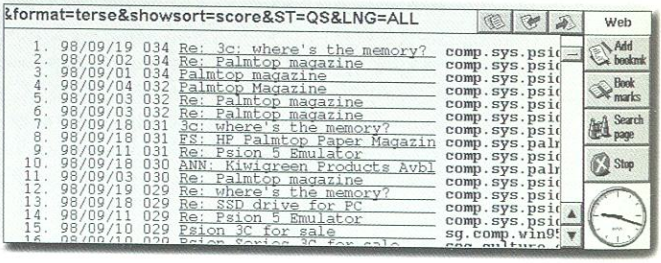
And finally...

Getting online for the first time is probably the most complex thing you'll ever need to do with your Psion, and if you've made the connection, give yourself a pat on the back! Hopefully you've found this series useful. If you'd like us to cover any other aspect of getting online, please let me know via *Palmtop*, or, now that you can email, get in touch with me at *petesipple@aol.com* !

Connecting with a mobile telephone

Mobile telephone technology is changing fast, and the range of compatible phones has changed greatly since we started this article. In the next issue, our regular 'Getting Started' feature will be devoted to specific questions on how to make an Internet or fax connection with the current crop of mobile phones.

People are talking about Palmtop magazine. Join them!


&format=terse&showsort=score&ST=QS&LNG=ALL
Web
1. 98/09/19 034 Re: 3c: where's the memory? comp.sys.psi
2. 98/09/02 034 Re: Palmtop magazine comp.sys.psi
3. 98/09/01 034 Palmtop magazine comp.sys.psi
4. 98/09/04 032 Palmtop Magazine comp.sys.psi
5. 98/09/03 032 Re: Palmtop magazine comp.sys.psi
6. 98/09/03 032 Re: Palmtop magazine comp.sys.psi
7. 98/09/18 031 3C: where's the memory? comp.sys.psi
8. 98/09/18 031 FS: HP Palmtop Paper Magazin comp.sys.pal
9. 98/09/11 031 Re: Psion 5 Emulator comp.sys.psi
10. 98/09/18 030 ANN: Kiwigreen Products Avbl comp.sys.pal
11. 98/09/03 030 Re: Palmtop magazine comp.sys.psi
12. 98/09/19 029 Re: where's the memory? comp.sys.psi
13. 98/09/18 029 Re: SSD drive for PC comp.sys.psi
14. 98/09/11 029 Re: Psion 5 Emulator comp.sys.psi
15. 98/09/10 029 Psion 3C for sale sg.comp.win9
Add bookmk
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Tech-Topics

Working with bitmaps

by Steve Litchfield

The use of bitmapped graphics seems to be a perennial source of confusion in the Psion world, not least because of some strange decisions and naming conventions adopted by Psion Software (now Symbian) themselves. Let me take you through a quick tour of the weird and wonderful world of bitmaps.

A pile of bits

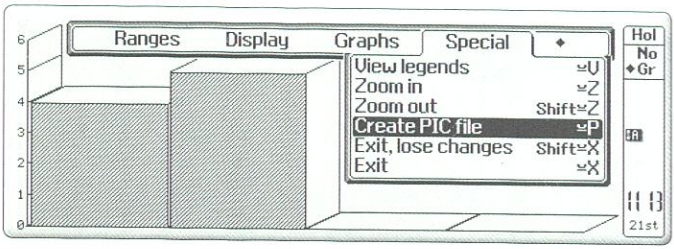
A bitmap is, quite literally, a map of individual 'bits', combinations of which can represent a pixel on screen in one or more 'colours'. In general, the larger the picture size and the more colours (or shades of grey) involved, the larger the resulting bitmap file needs to be in order to contain all the required information. Other common names for bitmaps include paintings, sprites, images and raster graphics.

Anyone who's ever played around with pictures on a PC or Macintosh will already know about the huge variety of different file formats in existence. For some reason, the author of every graphics-oriented program seems determined to invent his or her own file format to match, with (at the last count) about *30* competing file types (including BMP, PCX, GIF, JPG, TIF, etc.), many of which do much the same job. Against this chaotic background, it won't come as much of a surprise to discover that Psion have added another three formats to the list without reusing any of the existing ones!

To be fair, at least Psion have the excuse that completely different operating systems (SIBO, EPOC) were involved, but the interaction between Psion's PIC, MBM and SKETCH formats and the rest of the world still presents something of a minefield.

The PIC file that isn't...

The first obstacle is a major 'gotcha' for Series 3 owners. The built-in SHEET application produces, on request, graphs in Lotus 1-2-3 'PIC' format. Although billed as a major compatibility benefit (1-2-3 was the leading spreadsheet when SIBO was being designed), almost nobody actually uses PIC files in the real world. To make things worse Psion decided to use the same three letter extension for their *native* bitmap format for programs and screen captures. We therefore arrive at the confusing situation where the only way to print a SHEET graph is to 'grab' the screen (with [Psion]-[Control]-[Shift]-[s]) and print the resulting PIC file in a Psion painting program (such as Draw, reviewed in issue 3), all the while explaining to onlookers that no, the PIC file is totally different to the one they might originally have been trying to generate in SHEET itself.



Don't be fooled—use at your peril!

From 3 to 3a

The original Series 3 used simple 'black and white' PIC files, but the format was upgraded for the Series 3a (and subsequent models) to handle multiple bitmaps within the same file. The extra grey plane of the Series 3 screen was 'fudged' by the simple device of tacking the grey bitmap on the end of the black and white one. Thus a single PIC file could contain combinations of black/white or grey plane images, leaving it up to the referring application to know which was which. In order to load such a black/white-grey image pair into an OPL program, two separate **gLOADBIT** operations are needed, one for each 'plane' of the image.

Making the switch

The easiest way to convert PIC files to something readable on a desktop machine (or vice-versa) is to use the *WSPCX* program, available from all shareware sources. Although it's a rather unfriendly DOS 'command-line' utility, it not only does conversions in both directions (using PCX as the desktop bitmap format) but also lets programmers build complicated multi-image PIC files from collections of small PCX graphics. For help on how to use WSPCX, remember the usual DOS trick of just typing the program name without any parameters. This will display a list of all the possible options and switches.

It's worth noting that SIBO's built-in 64 kilobyte file limits also apply to PIC files. So it's all very well scanning in that huge map or painting, but if the resulting PIC file is over 64K it's never going to work. Time, I think, to move to the less-inhibited 32-bit world...

With 32 bits...

EPOC works in very different ways to the Series 3's SIBO operating system and all the

WSPCX—a very powerful little utility

```
C:\WINDOWS>wspcx

Wserv bitmap and PCX file conversion utility version 3.14a

WSPCX [-P|-W|-L|-I] [-X<num> -Y<num>] [-I] [-S] <filename> -O<filename>
Conversion modes
    -W  -   Convert .PIC to .PCX
    -P  -   Convert .PCX to .PIC
    -L  -   Link a list of .PIC files from a .PLK file
    -I  -   Invert image (can be used on .PCX .PIC or during translation)
Additional options
    -X<num>  -   Clip size on x-axis (.PCX to .PIC only);
    -Y<num>  -   Clip size on y-axis (.PCX to .PIC only);
    -O<name> -   Override default output file name
    -S       -   Silent mode
    -H       -   Full help text

C:\WINDOWS>
```

file formats changed markedly, incorporating 'streams' (a subject which I'm sure will be covered in a future Tech-Topics)—suffice it to say that applications such as SKETCH use a complicated file structure which is not easily matched by anything outside EPOC itself. Thus EPOC's creators introduced yet another format, the 'MBM' (Multi-BitMap) file, which was simple enough to be easily convertible to and from standard desktop 'BMP' (Windows bitmap) format. They also introduced a long-overdue element of compression, so that images with less detail take up less disk space.

Nothing's ever easy in the world of graphics, though, with yet more alternative names for the same thing: MBM files are also known as 'EPOC Picture files'. If you start up SKETCH and look at the 'Merge in' and 'Export' menu options, you'll see that both involve this intermediate format, letting you bring in PC-converted bitmaps for ultimately pasting in as SKETCH objects in other EPOC applications. Or, of course, to export a SKETCH into an MBM file that can be reused on the PC or Mac as needed. Like the PIC format before it (and spotting the clue in the format's name), an MBM file can contain more than one image. This makes it ideal for programmers wishing to build all the images needed for an application into one, more convenient, library file.

How to convert for EPOC

There are two ways to move bitmaps between EPOC and the desktop. Easiest of all is just to use PsiWin 2.1 (and above) to drag and drop them in the appropriate direction, whence BMP files become SKETCHes and vice-versa. The disadvantages of this are that only single-image MBM files are created and that everything's reduced to SKETCH's 4-colour mode, which tends to make rather a mess of what were originally beautiful images under Windows or MacOS.

The second technique is much more complicated, but produces better results if you're planning to view your images in something less colour-limited than SKETCH (e.g. MBMView or a custom program of your own). On the PsiWin CD is another small DOS utility called *BMCONV*. Among other capabilities, this can handle conversion of images into 16-colour MBM files and also (using plain text lists of input files) build true multi-bitmap image libraries of unlimited size. Again, typing BMCONV on the DOS command line on its own yields a list of possible parameters and hints, and you should refer to this (and to the OPL/32 manual) for more detail on all the useful things you can do with it.

One final tip is to make sure you get the order of the filenames right. BMCONV *always* accepts the MBM filename first and the BMP second, *whichever* way 'round' you're doing the converting. The 'direction' of the conversion is determined by the special '/' switches you specify. For example, to convert **FRED.BMP** to **FRED.MBM**, you'd type in:

```
BMCONV FRED.MBM FRED.BMP
```

and to go the other way round you'd type:

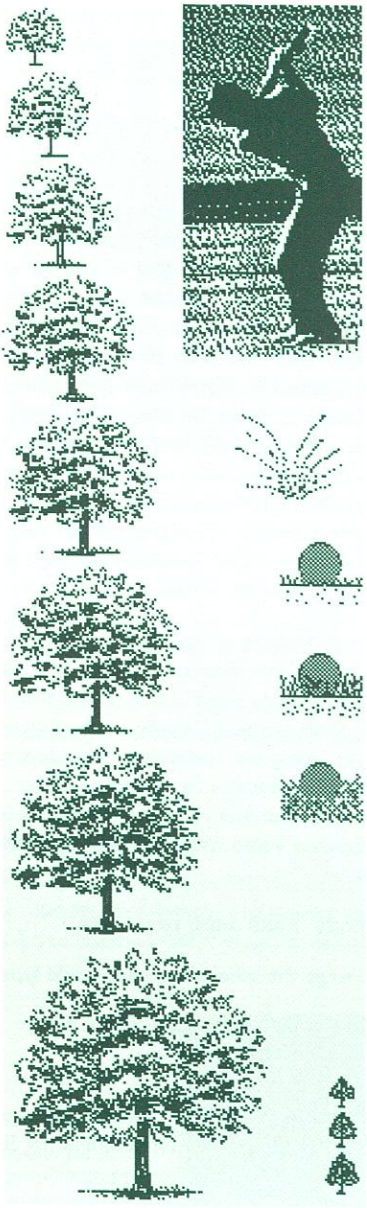
```
BMCONV /u FRED.MBM FRED.BMP
```

Loading into OPL

Using 'multi' bitmap picture files in both OPL/16 and OPL/32 involves specifying an offset in the call to **gLOADBIT**. For example,

```
id%=gLOADBIT ("test.mbm",0,13)
```

loads the 14th image (as offset 0 is the first



A composite black and white image within a larger 8-image PIC file

image) in the file 'test.mbm' into the drawable `id%`. This technique is immensely valuable when struggling to keep the pictures for a large project manageable. You can also sometimes reduce the number of files used by making each image larger than it needs to be and using the extra space effectively. For example, in my own *Fairway* golf game (for the Series 3), I made a single image containing all the trees for the game, used `idtrees%=gLOADBIT` right at the start and then just `gCOPY`ed the appropriate tree onto the screen as needed.

Dithering about

Another point worth mentioning is that it can often be better to 'dither' images with large numbers of colours (e.g. photos) into patterns of black and white dots on the PC before conversion onto a Psion. We covered this before in issue 19 (p42), but essentially the eye fills in all the myriad of shades and graduations from the dot patterns far better than from irregular areas of solid grey. As always, experiment to find out which techniques work best for your images. There are no hard and fast rules—make it your business to create your own rules as you go.

Further reading

Series 3 and 3a Programming Manuals

OPL/32 manual (supplied on CD with PsiWin 2 onwards)

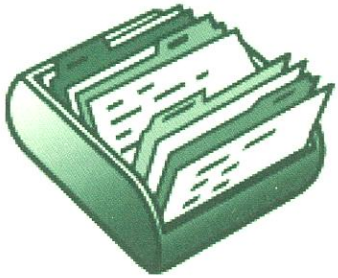
'Programming Psion Computers' by Leigh Edwards (see ad on page 124)

The comp.sys.psion.programmer newsgroup

Programming section of the Compuserve PSION forum

The Absolute Beginners Guide to OPL on 3lib.ukonline.co.uk

Working with DATA



Part 2 of our tutorial aimed at the relative beginner to the Series 5's built-in programs

by Geoff Preston

Maintaining the database

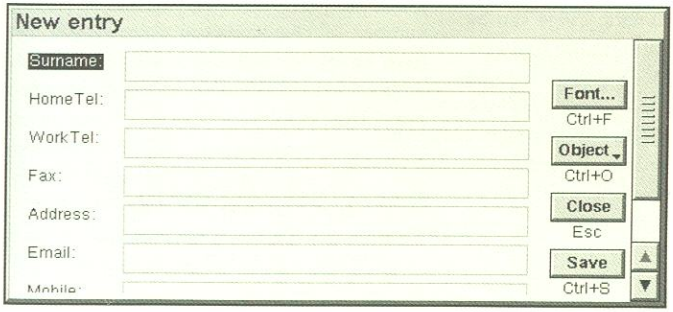
In the first instalment of our guide, we looked at creating a new database and setting up the various fields. We now show how to create, edit, search and sort records.

Create a new record

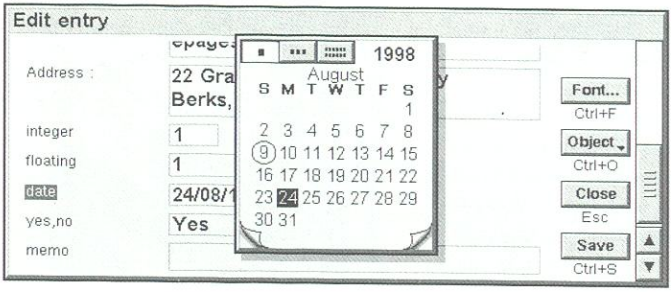
Entering information into DATA is a simple enough task. Tap the 'New Entry' button on the right hand tool bar and a blank record will be displayed with the cursor flashing on the first field. Enter the appropriate data and move to the next field by either tapping the field with the pen or using the up and down arrow keys.

Data types

The most frequently used data type will usually be 'Text' which, by the way, will also be the correct type for telephone numbers. The default length is 50, which means you may only enter a maximum of 50 characters. Using the [Enter] key will enable you to separate lines of text in the same field. Any text fields that are left blank will not be displayed in the normal 'Cards' view. Therefore, if the person whose details you are currently entering does not have (for instance) an email



About to enter data in your first record



Selecting a date from the pop-up calendar

address, just leave it blank. When the record is viewed, the email address field will not be displayed. If you really want to display the label for a field which is blank, enter [Shift]-[Space] where the data would go.

You will not be allowed to enter information that is incompatible with the data type chosen for each particular field. For example, if a field has been declared as 'Floating Point', you will only be allowed to enter the digits 0 to 9, a full stop (period) or a minus sign. In fact, you *will* be able to type in text and it *will* appear in the field, *but* you won't be allowed to leave it there, as an error message appears when you try to move on to the next field. *Be warned that you cannot change the data type of a field once entries have been made in the file.*

Other fields give only limited opportunity for keyboard entry. When the 'New entry' dialog opens, 'Number' fields will already be filled with the lowest permissible number that you declared earlier. The numeric range can be altered later, but the default is -100 to +100. The actual number in the field can be changed by tapping on the arrows on each side of it, using the arrow keys or typing in a new number. Keys other than numbers have no effect. Also, the minus key will not work if the lowest permissible number is set to zero or greater.

Date stamping

The 'Date' field will by default be filled with today's date, but can be changed by double-tapping the pen on the field to display a calendar. The buttons at the top of the resulting calendar dialog will let you choose one, three or 12 month views. Tap one of the dates with the pen and that date will be automatically entered into the field. You can also amend the date directly using the keyboard if you prefer.

The 'Yes/No' field, unsurprisingly, may only contain the words 'Yes' or 'No'. Change the state of this by tapping the arrows either side of the field, using the arrow keys on the keyboard or double-tapping the field with the pen and choosing from the menu. You may also select 'Yes' or 'No' directly by using the [y] or [n] key on the keyboard.

The 'Memo' field is a text field which, for practical purposes, allows an unlimited number of characters or objects. You can have up to 16 such fields. Like Text fields, empty Memo fields will not be displayed in the 'Cards' view.

Saving the new entry

Once all the data for a new record has been entered, tap the 'Save' button or press [Ctrl]-[s] which will save the new record into the

database and present a new dialog into which data for another new record may be entered. Once all of the records have been entered, tap the Close button or press [Esc] to finish.

Searching the database

This is potentially the most powerful feature of a computerised database. Referring back to the index cards that used to be found in public libraries that I mentioned in issue 19, the problem with them is that it's only possible to search in one field—the one that has been already sorted. If the cards were sorted by the author's surname, then all you would be able to find are the books by a particular author. If you know only the book title and want to find out who wrote it, then with that particular card index file arranged in that particular order, you would need to read through every single card. Clearly not a viable proposition.

But with a computerised database, it's the computer that trawls (very quickly) through every piece of information and therefore it's possible to locate anything in the file, regardless of how it has been ordered.

At the foot of the DATA screen is a window with the word 'Find' on the left. At its simplest level, enter a 'string' of letters (a word or phrase containing any combination of characters) in the window, and press [Enter]. This will list all records containing that string, regardless of which field it appears in. In my personal database, entering the string 'palm' gives four matching records: 'DCP Microelectronics' (whose MD's name is Palmer), 'Palmsville Garage' (where I have my car serviced), 'Palmtop magazine' (no explanation required) and 'Palmtop BV' (software creators for Psion computers). When entering a search string, case is irrelevant, so 'palm', 'PALM', 'Palm', and even 'PaLm', give exactly the same result.

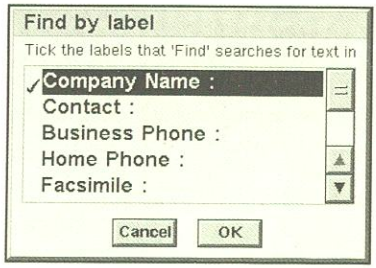
More than one match?

When more than one record matches the search string, you can move between records by using the 'Prev' (previous) and 'Next' buttons or the left and right arrow keys. On the right of the screen you usually have a list of matching records (in what is referred to as a 'browser') and these may be selected by tapping them with the pen or moving the bullet cursor with the left/right arrow keys.

It's possible (and sometimes desirable) to limit the number of fields used in a search. Use the menu command 'Tools | Find by label...', (or press [Ctrl]-[f]) and a list of the field names (or 'labels' in Psion parlance) will be displayed. Initially each one will have a tick beside it, indicating that the contents of each field will be examined during a search. To make the search ignore a field, tap it with the pen to 'untick' it. Tapping again will bring back the tick. Only fields which are ticked will be considered in all subsequent searches.

Editing a record

Inevitably records will need to be updated occasionally, or even removed altogether. In



Selecting which fields should be searched

the case of an address book, people may move house or change job, meaning that the details held in their record will need to be altered. Job changes in particular may mean that a particular person need no longer be on your contact list at all and so their record can be unceremoniously removed!

To change a record, simply display it and tap the 'Edit entry' button on the right hand toolbar. This will display a dialog identical to the 'New entry' one, except that the data previously entered in that record will be present. Any item of data may then be added, removed or altered. Save the altered record by tapping the 'Save' button or by pressing [Ctrl]-[s].

Removing a record

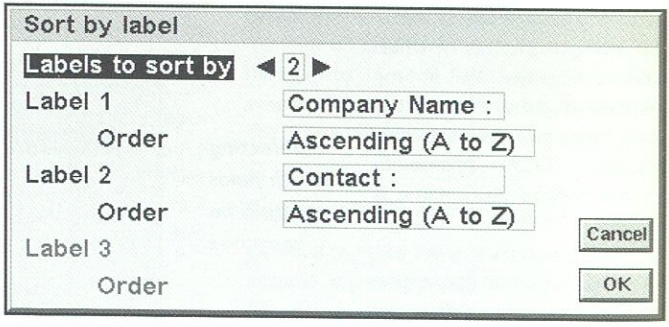
To delete a record, display it and use the menu command 'Edit | Delete entry...', or press [Ctrl]-[d]. You will be asked to confirm that this is indeed what you wish to do, so tap the 'Yes' button. If you make a mistake and delete a record that you really needed to keep, you can 'undelete' it with [Ctrl]-[z], providing you have not saved the altered database, compressed it or closed it. In other words, if you're having second thoughts, you need to remedy it *now* because you won't be able to later.

Sorting the Database

Initially the records are placed in the database in the order in which they were entered. Although by no means essential, sorting records into another order may prove advantageous in certain circumstances. For example, if you have a number of contacts who all belong to one company, sorting by company name would put all of those contacts together, making browsing easier.

To sort a database, use the menu command 'Tools | Sort by label...', which opens the sort dialog. Initially the number alongside 'Labels to sort by' will be set to zero, meaning that no sorting will take place. It is possible to sort by up to three fields or labels, enabling a kind of 'sub-sorting'. In the example, there are fields for company name and contact name. Setting the company name as the first label to sort by and the contact name as the second will sort all records by company name, and also all contacts within that company.

Once the sort order(s) have been set by choosing fields for Label 1, Label 2 and Label 3, press [Enter] or tap on 'OK' to sort the records. Further entries (more new records) will now automatically be placed into the order selected until the sort order is either changed or cancelled by setting the 'Labels to sort' by back to zero.



Setting up contact sorting within a company

FOR SALE, WANTED, ETC...

FOR SALE

1MB Series 3a, PsiWin, leather case, desk stand, 2 mains adaptors, printer cable, Psion Money on SSD, 3a Games Pack on SSD, 3a Games Deluxe on SSD, Widget Leisure Pack on floppy disk. All in excellent condition with manuals - £200 ono.

Contact: Janet Hopkins on 0181 667 9249 (day), 0181 657 0498 (evenings)

Psion Organiser II LZ64 with two mains adaptors, PC comms link, parallel printer link, 128K Datapak, 32K Rampak, Datapak formatter, Developer, Technical Reference manual, Machine code programming book, Personal Finance II, Pocket Spreadsheet, Concise Oxford Spelling Checker, Autoscribe Plus. All in excellent condition with manuals - £100.

Contact: Ian Pollen 01843 861248 or 0468 175142 (mobile)

Series 3a (2MB), 3Fax Modem, Printer link, PsiWin and Serial Link, Money, PsiMail Internet on floppy disk, 512K RAM SSD, 128K RAM SSD, SSD 128KB Flash - £380 the lot. Will consider selling separately.

Contact: Paul Carroll 0777 577 3158 email: bhmuk@globalnet.co.uk

Mobile: 0777 577 3158

4MB CompactFlash - £30

Contact: Ian Pollen 01843 861248 (home), 0171 3362951 (work), 0468 175142 (mobile)

Series 5 (8MB) with PsiWin CD, all leads and manuals, mains adaptor, original boxes etc., plus 24MB CF memory card, leather case, plus lots of software, all as new condition, hardly used - £500 ono.

Contact: Will on (01458) 833864 email: willparfitt@dial.pipex.com

Psion dual SSD drive for PC, with software for both flash and Solo SSDs, powered from its own PC expansion card - cost £170, going for £75.

Contact: David Aldous tel/fax 01491 576837

2MB Series 3a in excellent condition, with parallel link, serial link, user manual, Widget Quick Reference Guide, desk stand, Vega carrying cases for computer and SSDs, plus software on SSD: Games 3a, Games Deluxe 3a, Autoroute Express, Toolkit 2, Tube, Scrabble, Monopoly and En Route (all with manuals) - £350.

Also 512K Siena with carrying case, user manual and Widget Quick Reference guide - £150.

Contact: G Keyworth on 01293 531554 (home), 0171 9226267 (work), 0403 161695 (mobile)

2MB Series 3a in excellent condition with manual, PsiWin link with manual plus 3a printer cable - £150 ovno. Will split items, but complete purchase takes preference.

Contact: Andy Dunn (Southampton area) on 0585 455478 (daytime) or message pager on 07654 265131

"On The Net"

The latest gossip from Psion's online community

Once again Pete Sipple surfs through the words of wisdom written by Psion users worldwide. Discussions found on the Internet over recent weeks include sorting spreadsheets, translated text and brave bikers, plus reaction to Psion's new baby...

Mx'ed feelings

Psion's newest machine has, as expected, created much discussion...

"It's a sad day for Psion. I sincerely doubt that Psion is going to sell many of these 3mx'es. I agree that Psion needed momentum but this was not the route to take. I don't know if many of you noticed this, but this machine isn"t going to be released in the United States. That either means that Psion recognises that the product is an intermediary step on the road to an improved S5, or that Psion is conceding the handheld market to CE." (onaks@my-dejanews.com)

"Methinks that you belong to the club that said 'It's a sad day for Psion...' when Psion launched the Series 5. We soon will see if that's true. Psion already have momentum: they sold 500,000 Series 5s in the first 12-14 months... the same as ALL makes of CE machines in the first year... This is not a intermediary step, in my opinion, it is a different machine for a different kind of user." (kronk@mail.geocities.com)

"From what I've read of the 'new' 3mx machine from Psion it seems to me that it'll run all the old 3a/3c apps, just at a faster speed. Am I the only one who sees this as pointless? I owned a 2MB 3a until about 3 months back when I purchased a secondhand S5. The 3a never seemed slow to me, and surely, if you want apps that run faster they essentially become bigger, 2MB is hardly enough to accommodate much in my limited opinion. This whole scenario reminds me of when Coca Cola 'updated' their cola flavour, what they failed to realise was that there was no demand for a new flavour, much as I believe that there is no demand for a new Psion machine that essentially breaks no moulds." (teklink@netcomuk.co.uk)

"I disagree. Some time ago a 3a user said that he did a search in a 25KB Agenda file in 23 seconds. The same search in a 32KB S5 Agenda file was done in 3-5 seconds... Now with the 3mx, these numbers should get closer..." (kronk@mail.geocities.com)

"Having had a play with the 3mx, I was initially rather impressed. One of the first things I did was go to the Apps menu in System, to have a look at the 'About 3mx' function. Imagine my surprise (and subsequent amusement) when it didn't have an 'About 3mx' - but an 'About 3c' option instead! Come on Psion, that bug could not have been buried too deeply, if a user found it within 10 seconds! Also, I know the case is a rather tasteful colour, but I rather liked the 3c's 'silky' feel on the case. However - as far as speed is concerned, the 3mx IS impressive. I managed to have a play with a Series 3mx and a Series 5 in Dixons - and it was with some amazement I had to concede that the 3mx is actually faster than the Series 5! I was a little disappointed with the 3mx overall, because Psion have not really made the most of releasing this little machine - much improvement could have been done." (O.D.Jones-CSSE96@cs.bham.ac.uk)

"I think it's only pointless if one expects what the marketing hype suggests: a giant step forward. Instead, I think we all should see the 3mx as the proof that the Series 3 line is not dropped by Psion (which is great) and nothing more. The inclusion of a faster processor is normally something that goes without saying when a computer maker releases a new machine. In this respect it is not pointless, but natural." (garcia@*loeschen*rummelplatz.uni-mannheim.de)

"Having seen all those 'It's a waste of time' messages, I think I should give my 2 cents here too. Apparently, the processor of the Psion 3c will not be produced any more, thus Psion had two choices: either drop the Series 3 market or find an alternative. The Series 3 is still a huge market share for Psion plc and the release of the 3mx should not change the plans for the next Series 5 model. EPOC (the Series 5) is still their main objective for the future - the 3mx will just replace the 3c so why make such a huge noise - just because they released it before the Series 5c? (or 5b or 5y...)" (fred@palm-time.com)

Get it sorted!

Enterprising Psion owners have found a way to get around an omission in the Series 5 software...

"Is there any way that data can be sorted in Sheet without having to go back and forth to your Excel worksheet via PsiWin?" (ddutoit@cmc.gov.za)

"Have a look at Pascal Nicolas' Macro5 homepage. There is a macro for sorting entries in Sheet. Although it's limited maybe it works for you: http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Pines/1215/" (un3t@rz.uni-karlsruhe.de)

"Try exporting to a text file, importing to a data file, sorting, exporting to text and finally importing to SHEET... Phew!" (Harmed@btinternet.com)

"How do you export from SHEET to a text file? There's no such option on my File menu..." (anj@ast.cam.ac.uk)

"You cut and paste it into WORD!" (fishtankuk@hotmail.com)

Be afraid—be very afraid...

I'm still not sure whether this message was serious or not. I've heard of Psion users doing strange things with their machines, but...

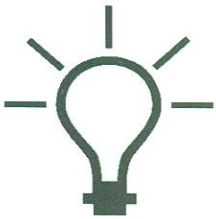
"I want to do text entry on a PDA while cycling and am looking for a one-handed keyboard, preferably a chord keyboard, compatible with Psion 5 or another PDA. Anyone know of any?" (carl.etnier@nospam.nlh10.nlh.no)

"Sounds dangerous to me!" (ajai@ibm.net)

"Please tell me you do not live in Cambridge, as the sight of a dead Psioneer would distress me." (rufus@joking.greencathedral.com)

Psion related discussions take place in several Usenet newsgroups including comp.sys.psion.misc, as well as the Psion conference on CiX, the Psion area on AOL, and the Psion forum on CompuServe.

Hints & Tips



Every item published in this section wins a prize!

Accidental deletions

If you accidentally delete a piece of text on a Series 3 machine by pressing the [Delete] key, don't forget that it has simply been moved to the clipboard and is not (yet) lost. Just paste it straight back in by pressing [Control]-[i].

Of course, if you subsequently press the [Delete] key a second time the first item will be consigned to oblivion, but you can always recover from your most recent mistake!

Jan Henson
Slough, Berkshire

Squeaky hinges?

If your Series 3 hinges are creaking every time you open or close the machine, try removing the battery cover and making *tiny* adjustments to the four cross-head screws that run alongside the main batteries (no need to take the batteries out to do this). Under no circumstances loosen the screws by enough that they could work loose and fall out—small adjustments only!

A few minutes of tweaking can often reduce the creaking sound substantially.

Eric Loftus
Truro, Cornwall

Geofox WORD templates

On the Series 5 you can create a template for WORD that will be launched whenever you create a new file. That is done by saving a file called 'Normal', formatted as you want, in the 'Apps\Word' directory on the C: drive.

That doesn't work on the Geofox One, where the file has to be called 'Normal.uk' or 'Normal.us' (depending on the whether you have your machine configured to UK or US English). I find the default font size on the Geofox One to be just a little bit too small for comfortable typing, but zooming in makes it too big. I also like 'Heading 1' centred, and have set up the template accordingly.

John Fry
Brackley, Northamptonshire

Geofox reload procedure

If your Geofox One (16MB version) has a hard reset for any reason (e.g. total battery failure), then you need to load and run some patches provided on one of the support CDs before reloading from a backup. One of those patches is essential in order to persuade the operating system that it can have an internal drive greater than 8MB in size. If you don't load and run it first, the machine will reset as soon as you load more than 8MB of files back on to it. This is documented on the CD, but not everyone thinks

to look at the support CD under those circumstances!

John Fry
Brackley, Northamptonshire

ROM 1.00 CF problem

While getting my Psion 5 screen fixed recently, I had the ROM upgraded from 1.00 to 1.01. I then found that my CompactFlash didn't work—it made the machine hang up every time it was switched on. The CF checked out fine with the ROM 1.00 machine, but not with any Series 5 running version 1.01 of the operating system.

Psion helpline then informed me that there is a file on the CF, necessary for version 1.00, but not for version 1.01. Keeping this file on the CF causes the machine to hang, the solution being to delete the file: \system\libs\ P_FAULT.LLD.

Ian Goulbourne
Tynemouth

Save power with infrared

When transferring data via infrared using the Series 3c, you can reduce battery consumption by setting the 'Power setting' to 'Low' from the 'Communications' sub-menu. This works fine up to a distance of around 30cm. This is particularly useful if you are sending information between two 3c machines, as it's usually easy to put them very close to each other.

This trick doesn't work with the new Series 3mx, which only has a single setting for infrared power.

Anton Gleeson
Düsseldorf, GERMANY

Viewing with Message Suite

Version 1·5 of Message Suite will allow the viewing of most Microsoft Word files by double-tapping them from the system screen, but only if they have a file name ending in '.doc'. This viewer checks to make sure that the file is of the right type, but the companion text viewer doesn't, opening the way for a useful trick.

If you want to see the contents of a file displayed, you simply rename it to end in '.txt' and double-tap it. The results may not make a lot of sense, but can help you to work out what the file *really* is, and this can also be useful in recovering text from word processor files that the Series 5 cannot read (e.g. RTF, older versions of MSWord, etc.)

Using multiple mailboxes

Another new feature of Message Suite is the support for multiple mailboxes, allowing you to close one and open another within the same phone call. To make the feature work without the line being dropped every time you switch between mailboxes, you have to go to the 'Internet' entry in the Control Panel, and set the 'On exit, stay online for...' entry to something non-zero (e.g. thirty seconds).

Brian Dorridge
Beckenham, Kent

Send your tips!

All published hints and tips will earn the author a FREE item of software from our special collection, valued at up to £70!

Q&A

PC-less backups

Q I don't have access to a PC, so I have no way to perform a backup of the data on my Series 5. I've now got lots of important information stored on it, and am becoming terrified that I'll lose everything if the machine breaks down or gets lost or stolen. Is there anything I can do?

Harold Pfeiffer
Portland, Oregon, USA

A **This was always a big problem with the Series 3 range, because the only non-PC backup alternatives were either Purple Software's Cyclone floppy disk drive or the purchase of a large (and expensive) SSD, both likely to set the user back a hundred pounds or two.**

Series 5 CompactFlash prices have now reached a level that you can get an 8MB CF disk for as little as £45. With this you can perform a complete backup of your machine (just use the 'Copy disk' command from the 'Disk' menu on the System screen). Making a backup to CF disk means that you can then take the CF out of your machine and put it somewhere safe.

If you already store some of your vital data on a CF disk anyway, then life is more difficult. Even if you have a second CF for backup purposes then you're presented with the problem of how to transfer from one CF to another. Unless you have space on your internal memory to swap the files back into RAM, swap the CFs over, then copy back to the second CF then you won't be able to backup the data on your main CF disk.

Data stored on CF is inherently much more secure than that kept in internal memory (they don't suffer from system crashes and battery failure), but they are still not *completely* safe. If you have your main data on CF disk then you really need to find a PC-owning friend who will perform backups for you. It may seem like a nuisance now, but consider the sinking feeling if you suddenly lost the entire contents of *your* machine, and had no backup to rely on.

Cheap CF storage—the ideal solution for PC-less backups

Put your CD onto floppy!

Q Not everyone has access to a CD-ROM drive, so why don't you offer the Palmtop CD on floppy disk instead?

Albert Goring
Aberdeen

A **The *Palmtop* CD-ROM contains around *two thousand* programs, plus lots of other useful Psion-related**

information. A single floppy disk would only hold a few dozen programs at most, and would have no space for all the other things we put onto the CD. We sympathise with PC-less readers who have no access to a CD-ROM drive, but the only other option would be to penalise all the people who *do* have CD access, by putting just the top few programs onto a floppy disk.

In a questionnaire we mailed to around 2000 readers a few months back, an overwhelming 85% of people replied that they expected to find our CD useful. Our CD is far more up-to-date and comprehensive than *any* other shareware compilation CD-ROM on the market and provides the maximum value to the maximum number of readers—all for free!

American-English dictionary?

Q I have just bought a Psion Series 5 in the United States (where they are cheaper). Previously a proud Series 3a user, I am absolutely thrilled with my new machine. However, being an American purchase, it is loaded with an *American* English dictionary. Is it possible to install a UK English dictionary, and if so how?

Michael Nutt
Gosport, Hampshire

A Unfortunately not. The entire Psion range now have their spelling checker software built into ROM, so there's no way to load in an alternative dictionary. Series 3/3a users without a built-in spell checker can purchase the add-on 'Spell Checker and Thesaurus' on SSD, but everyone else must live with what's already built into the machine. This is one disadvantage for non-US users trying to save money by purchasing a machine in the USA.

Questions?

All published questions will earn the author a FREE item of software from our special collection, valued at up to £70!

'Writing' in Series 5 AGENDA

Q When using AGENDA, wouldn't it be nice if you could quickly hand-write entries? Can't I do this with SKETCH?

Michael Nutt
Gosport, Hampshire

A Just go into either the 'Day' or 'Week' view and move the cursor to the day in which you wish to add an entry. Then tap the 'Sketch' button in the right-hand toolbar and scribble out your note, hitting the 'Done' button at the top of the screen when you've finished. Hitting the 'OK' button on the 'Create new entry' dialog will then take you back to the previous view, with the sketch in place.

If your graphic or text is large, hit the 'More...' button before closing the 'Create new entry' dialog, go to the 'Text' tab, tap on the graphic to select it, then shrink down the picture using the 'Scaling' commands after tapping the 'Format...' button. Then tap 'OK' to take you back into the AGENDA window.

By keeping your scribbles small in the SKETCH window it's possible to get good results without going to all the trouble of scaling things to fit.

Murgan's Musings

Stephen Murgan confesses to a small lapse in his backup regime...

I write this article with a heavy heart and not a small amount of embarrassment. As a Psion user of some five years vintage, I have always been inordinately proud of the fact that I have never lost any data.

To be sure, during my six years and four machines of Psion ownership I have had my fair share of problems, including a malfunctioning button bar, two busted hinges and several iterations of the dreaded battery lead problem, but nothing that resulted in significant data loss.

Until today. A day, to coin a phrase, that will live in infamy. I feel annoyed, ashamed even, and a little bit sheepish after all that I have said through the years about the importance of keeping backups. The worst thing of all is that I have only myself to blame.

This morning my batteries ran out. This was no surprise as I was expecting them to do so, and consequently I was carrying a spare set of rechargeables in my briefcase (I am opposed to disposable batteries in general—my Nickel Cadmium rechargeables are over four years old and still going strong, but that is another story), so it was the work of a moment for me to pop them in before I was whisked off to yet another meeting. It was one of those days when everything was happening much too fast for my liking.

I don't know how I managed to do without it for such a long period of time, but I didn't switch it on for at least four hours—anyone who knows me can tell you that this is a rare occurrence. When I finally "whipped it out" and switched on later in the day, nothing happened.

It took only seconds to find the reason—a quick look in the battery case yielded the answer—the batteries were in *the wrong way round*. No problem, just turn them around, put the case back on, switch it on and...

<BEEEP!>

Cue the sick, sinking feeling in the guts as I realised that the memory of my little silicon friend had been wiped clean. Erased. We are talking total digital amnesia here.

It is at times like this that I normally give thanks to God that I have a recent backup that I can fall back on. In this case, however, there is one small but significant problem. I

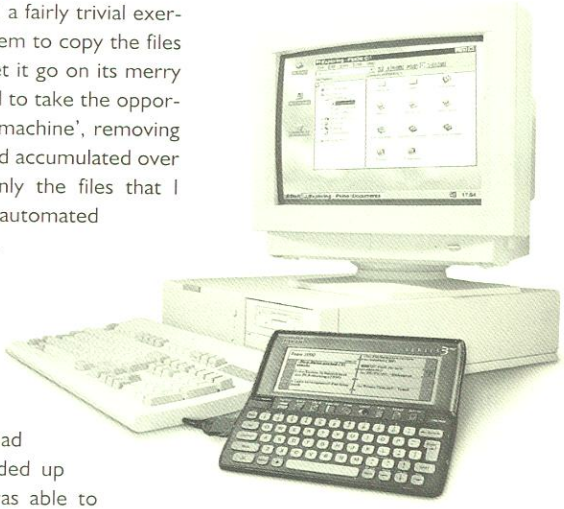
don't have one. I cannot even *remember* when the last backup was taken, which means that it was at least a week ago. A lot of water can pass under the bridge in the space of one week.

Ironically, I had the opportunity to back up the machine, but didn't. I was transferring a file from my Psion to the PC using PsiWin. It had been a long day, it was getting late and I was tired, and so I didn't bother to take a backup while connected. This is unusual for me, but when your bed is calling your name it's difficult to think straight. An incremental backup would have taken about three minutes to copy all of my changed files to the relative safety of my computer's hard disk. It wouldn't have been much effort...

But I *didn't*. As a result I lost all of my recent changes and had to restore what I could and fill in the gaps from memory—a memory that is unreliable at best.

The following day

A full restore is, in itself, a fairly trivial exercise. Just set up the system to copy the files from PC to Psion and let it go on its merry way. However, I decided to take the opportunity to 'clean out the machine', removing much of the junk that had accumulated over the years by loading only the files that I needed. This turned the automated restore process into a time-consuming and tedious operation. Still, once in six years ain't too bad.



Once the culling and copying was complete I had everything I needed loaded up and ready to go, and was able to save a few hundred kilobytes of space. The last backup was six days old, so the losses were not as bad as I had feared. Still, it will take a few days before I am up to date. I can thank my lucky stars that nothing major has been lost, though some of my articles lost a couple of edits. Looking back now, I feel like I got off lightly.

The moral of this cautionary tale is twofold. Firstly, when you replace the batteries, always test that the machine still works! From my experience I can conclude that putting in the main batteries the wrong way round and leaving them that way for hours at a time somehow (perhaps unsurprisingly) neutralises the backup battery.

Secondly, never assume that you can get by without backups. If it can happen to me, it can happen to *you*.

The Psion Reference

UseNet Groups

comp.sys.psion.announce
comp.sys.psion.misc
comp.sys.psion.comm
comp.sys.psion.apps
comp.sys.psion.programmer
comp.sys.psion.marketplace
comp.sys.psion.reviews

CompuServe Psion discussion	GO PSION
CiX Psion conference	join psion
AOL - Psion Noticeboard	Psion/General noticeboard - Keyword: Psion

Psion-related software

New World Technology Site	www.nwt.com/shareware
Usenet Binary Group	comp.binaries.psion
CompuServe	GO PSION
CiX	'join psion', then look in '/files' and '/s5_files' file lists
PsionKing	*www.psionking.com*

Psion FAQ

The Frequently Asked Questions document contains useful information, facts, names, addresses and numbers:

Series 3 version:	*www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/8130/faq.htm*
Series 5 version:	*www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/8130/s5part1.htm*

World Wide Web sites

Psion PLC	*www.psion.com*
Symbian (Psion Software)	*www.symbian.com*
Palmtop magazine	*www.palmtop.co.uk*
3-Lib shareware	*3lib.ukonline.co.uk*
PocketInfo	*www.pocketinfo.org*
5 Alive!	*5alive.psionking.com*
Palmtop BV	*www.palmtop.nl*
Palmscape	*www.palmscape.com*
Purple Software	*www.purplesoft.com*
RMR Software	*www.rmrsoft.com*

The Games Directory

As part of *Palmtop*'s commitment to bring you as much useful information as possible, we're going to ring the changes in this spot in the magazine. This issue, we have a guide to Series 3 and Series 5 games. You may find it useful to refer author names back to the directory in issue 19.

Disclaimers:

Not all the games below have been tested by us. Some shareware games may just be 'demos', i.e. too crippled to play fully and may not necessarily be on the Palmtop CDs. All information in the table is as accurate as possible at the time of going to press. If you distribute a game which is not mentioned in the table, please get in touch with Palmtop Publications so that we can rectify the omission.

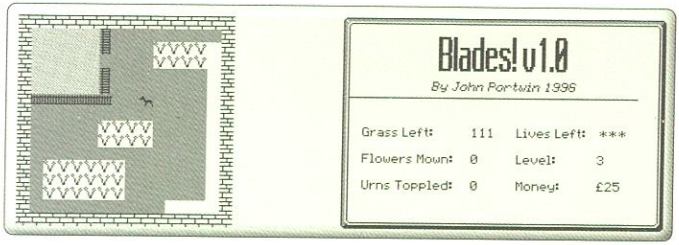
KEY:

m/c - denotes which machine the software runs on: 3=Series 3a/3c/3mx, 5=Series 5/Geofox

Typical ZIP - gives ZIP file name for latest or recent version

Typ. - S=shareware, F=freeware, C=commercial

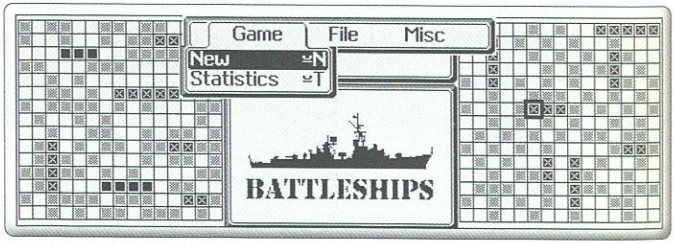
Name	m/c	Typical ZIP	Description	Typ.	Author/distributor
3D Space Attack	3	ATTACK	Shoot-em-up	S	Thomas I
5 Pack	5	n/a	various	C	Purple Software
Aaahh	5	AAAHH221	Tile shuffling puzzle	F	Nigel Garnett
Ants	3	ANTS	Lemmings-like arcade game	S	Thomas I
Asteroids	5	ASTEROID2	Simple shoot-em-up game	S	Daniel Landes
Atomic	5	ATOMIC14	Tetris arcade game	F	Steve Litchfield
Awele	5	AWELEENG	Strategy game	S	Maurice Talazac
Backgammon	3/5	BG181	Complete Backgammon	S	Matt Millar



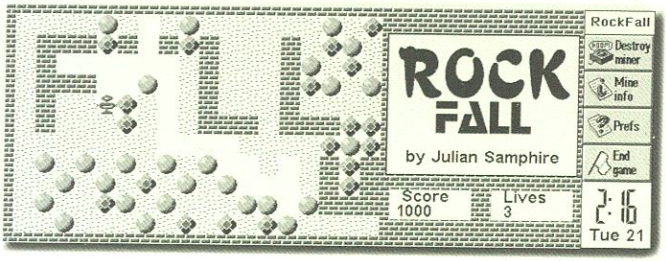
Mow that lawn, but mind the dog!

Name	m/c	Typical ZIP	Description	Typ.	Author/distributor
Backgammon	3/5	n/a	Backgammon	C	Purple Software
Backgammon	5	BACKGAM	Simple Backgammon	F	Daniel Landes
Bangkok	3	BANGKO	Dice game	F	Ralph Nolte
Battleships/SeaStrike	3/5	BSHIP120	Strategy game	S	Mark Avey
Batz	3	BATZ	Breakout game	F	Proteus Developments
Bismarck	3	BISMARCK	Card solitaire	S	J¸rgen Bermann
BlackBox	3	BLACKBOX	Deduction game	F	Mark Fitzpatrick
Blades	3	BLADES	Arcade/strategy game	S	John Portwin
Blitz	3	BLITZ	Bombing arcade game	F	Jason Robinson
Blitz3a	3	BLITZ20	Bombing arcade game	S	Richard Smedley
Blox	3	BLOX	Number/tile/shuffling puzzle	S	PsiClone Software
Boggel	3	BOGGEL	Word-making game	S	Protronics
Boggly	3	BOGLY131	Boggle word game	S	Chris Kessell
Boing	3	BOING	Breakout clone	S	Didier Pirottin
Bomz	3/5	n/a	Strategy/adventure game	C	Mick Andon/Psion
Bowling	3	BOWL11	Card solitaire	F	Cade Roux
Bridge	5	n/a	Bridge game	C	Purple Software
Bunnies	3	BUNNIES	Platform game	F	Jason Robinson
Casino BlackJack	3/5	BJ-V3-7/S5-BJ-11	Pontoon card game	S	Ben Vaughan
Castle II	3	CASTLE2	Graphical adventure	S	Darren Prescott
Chain Reaction	3	REACT11	Bomb-placing strategy game	F	Adam Dawes
Chess	3	CHESS12	Chess game	S	Johan Van Barel
Chess	3/5	n/a	Chess	C	Purple Software
Chinese Chess	3/5	n/a	Chinese Chess	C	Purple Software

Confusing? War usually is...

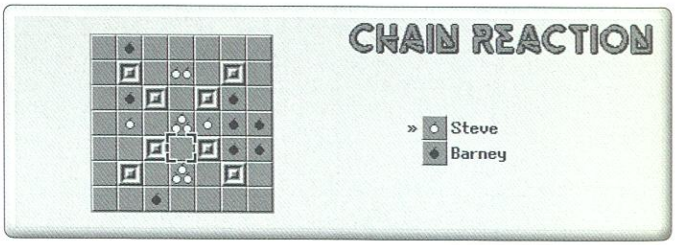


Name	m/c	Typical ZIP	Description	Typ.	Author/distributor
Columns	3	COLS220	Columns game	S	Steve Godfrey
Columns	5	CLMN_100	Columns arcade/strategy game	S	JS Greenwood
Connect4	3	CONNECT	Connect4/Reversi variant game	S	Didier Pirottin
Connect4	5	CONNECT4	Connect 4 strategy game	F	Raymond Stone
Connect 4	3/5	C4-V3-7/CONNEC4	Connect 4 strategy	S	Ben Vaughan
Cribbage	5	CRIBBAGE	The traditional card game	S	Nick Dawkins
De3ender	3	DE3EN1	Defender arcade epic	S	Mark Wheadon
Diamonds	3/5	DIAMON12/S5DIA	Diamonds platform adv.	S	Nick Dawkins
Dino Zone	5	S5-DINO	DinoZone strategy game	S	Ben Vaughan
Doshido	3	DOSHIDO	Ishide with dominoes	S	J¸rgen Bermann
DTris	3	DTRIS100	Poker Dice meets Tetris!	S	Jon Read
Dungeon	3/5	DUNG1-4/S5DUN1-1	3D dungeon adventure	S	Nick Dawkins
Dungeons	3	DUN22	Dungeons game	F	Thomas 1
EMCC Backgammon	3	n/a	Backgammon game	C	EMCC
Enboggle	5	ENBOGGLE	Boggle word game	S	Jean-Baptiste Lernout
Fairway	3	FAIR24	Golf game/simulation	S	Steve Litchfield
Finality	5	ENFINALITY	Simple box-removing game	F	Jean-Baptiste Lernout
FiveOaks	3	FO120	FiveOaks Yahtzee game	S	Chris Hennings
Freecell	3/5	FREEC107/FC5	Card solitaire	S	Mark Fitzpatrick
Frotz5	5	FROTZS5	Infocom adventure player	F	Fred Bouvry
Fruit Crazy	5	FRUTCRZY	Fruit machine simulation	S	Ben Vaughan
FTris	3	FTRIS	Simple Tetris clone	F	Proteus Developments
Gamble Crazy	3	GAMBLE	Slot machine game	F	Mike McCarthy



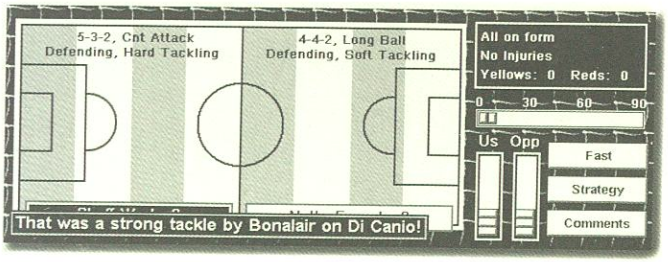
Don't get crushed!

Name	m/c	Typical ZIP	Description	Typ.	Author/distributor
GO-MOKU	3	n/a	Classic Japanese board game	C	EMCC
GoldMonk	3	GOLDMONK	Banana-gobbling strategy game	S	Marco Aicardi
Golf	5	n/a	Complete golf simulation	C	Psion
Golf Solitaire	5	GOLF5	Card solitaire	S	Ian Webster
Greedy	3	GREEDY11	Superb Monopoly variant	F	Fred Botton
Hangman	5	HANGMAN	Hangman letter-guessing	S	Matt Thomas
Harp	3	HARP100F	Card solitaire	S	E. te Winkel
Haunted House	3	HHOUSE	Graphical adventure	S	Ulrich Krinzner
Hearts	3/5	HEARTS12/S5HEAR11	Hearts card solitaire	S	Nick Dawkins
HecaTris	5	HECATRIS	Sideways-scrolling tetris	F	Hedwig Carlier
Hexxagon	3	3AHEXX	Hexagons game	S	Marco Aicardi
Hungry	3	HUNGRY11	Snake-based arcade game	S	Didier Pirottin
Hungry Morace	3	MORACE	Pacman style game	F	Jason Robinson
Imperium	5	IMP	'Command and Conquer' clone	S	Simon Jacobs
Infocom interpreter	3	INFO8M	Infocom adventure player	S	Bryan Scattergood
Invasion	3/5	INV1016/INV1032	Strategy game	S	Thomas I
JongJong32	5	MJ32	Mah-Jong game	S	Micro Cheng
Jumpy	3	JUMPYC2	'Classic' platform arcader	S	Jon Read
Klax	5	KLX5_100	Arcade puzzle game	S	JS Greenwood
LEM	3	LEM-V1-3	Lunar lander game	S	Ben Vaughan
LightBox	5	LBOX10	Fast puzzle game	S	Trevor Mendham
Light Cycles	3/5	LC-V3-6	Tron arcade game	S	Ben Vaughan
Lighter	5	LIGHTER	Light-switching strategy game	F	Daniel Landes
Lights Off	3	LO-11	Logic game	S	Ben Vaughan



Working towards critical mass—take cover

Name	m/c	Typical ZIP	Description	Typ.	Author/distributor
Lords of Midnight	3	MIDN101	Adventure game	S	Gareth Bell
Lost in 3D	5	5LOSTIN3D	Labyrinth-style game	F	Neil Sands
Master	3	MAST102	Mastermind clone	F	Lieuwe de Vries
Mastermind	5	5MAST100	Mastermind game	F	Lieuwe de Vries
Mastermind	5	M_MIND5	MasterMind logic game	F	Neil Sands
Memory	3	MEMO12	Card-matching memory game	F	Fred Botton
Meteor	3	METEOR	Dodge the meteors	S	Didier Pirottin
Meteor	3	METEORG	Meteor dodging + sub-games	S	J. Stansfield
Milles Bournes	3/5	MBORN10/MB5_10E	Novel card strategy game	F	Fred Botton
Minesweeper	3	MINES133	Minesweeper	F	Steve Godfrey
Mirror	3	MIRROR	Tile-mirroring puzzle	F	Paul Bowlay
Mis5ile Defense	5	MIS5DEF	Missile Command arcade game	S	Palmtime
Monopoly	3/5	n/a	The famous board game	C	Psion dealers
Montana	3	MON1A	Card solitaire	S	SP Services
Nim	5	NIM	The pile-swapping game	F	Daniel Landes
Noughts and Crosses	3	OXO3D	3D Noughts and Crosses!	F	Nick Craig-Wood
Noughts and Crosses	5	OANDX10	Noughts and Crosses	F	Ian Hutton
Oedipus	5	OEDIPUS10	Crossword playing system	S	Trevor Mendham
Orbitel	3	ORBITEL1	Isometric arcade/strategy game	F	Ian Webster
Othello	3	OTHS3A21	Othello strategy game	F	Andrew Moore
Othello	5	OTHELLOV1	Othello strategy game	S	Robert Longbottom
PacMan	3	PACMAN	Pacman arcade game	S	Paul Williams
Palabra	3	PALABRA2	Arcade-style casino word games	S	David Godfrey

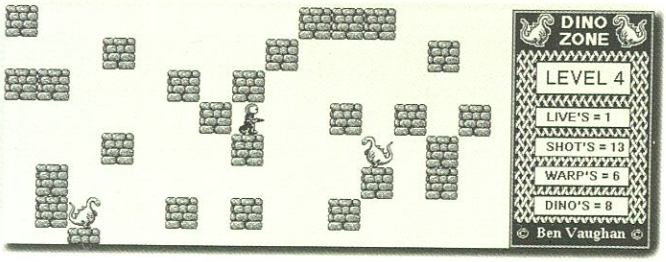


PsiSoccer Manager—no players, but plenty of action!

Name	m/c	Typical ZIP	Description	Typ.	Author/distributor
Patients	3	PATIENTS	Card Solitaire	S	Nic Chilton
Pengo Ro	5	PENGORO	Arcade game	S	Bohdan Lechnowsky
Ping	3	PING10U	Pong bat and ball game	F	Craig Campbell
Pipe5	5	PIPE5	Pipemania clone	F	DevRag Software
Pipeline	5	PIPEHISI	Pipemania-derived strategy game	S	BSoft
PocketChess	5	PKTCHESS	Pocket Chess	F	S Ludwig/Fred Bouvry
Poker	5	S5POKER1	Video poker game	F	Steve Litchfield
Pong	3	PONG22	The PONG bat and ball game	F	Sam Morris
P-Plus Bridge	5	n/a	Bridge card game	C	Breva Software
Psi-Jong	3	PJ-3A-14	Tile memory game	S	Ben Vaughan
Psionopoly	3	MONOP194	Monopoly clone	F	Neil Roberts
PsiSoccer Manager	3/5	PSMD5 (demo)	Football management simulation	C	Artamedia
Psitris	3	PSITRIS3	Tetris arcade puzzler	S	Thomas Wright
PsiTris	5	PSIT115E	Tetris game	F	FatCatz Software
Puff	3	PUFF	Backgammon-like game	S	J_rgen Bermann
Puzzle	3	PUZZLE	Sliding-tile puzzle	F	Steve Godfrey
Pyramid	5	PYRAMID	Pyramid card solitaire	F	Fred Bouvry
Reset	3	RESET	Cross-inverting logic game	F	RusTeK software
Risk	3	RISKSH	Risk strategy game	S	WJ Hawkins
Risk	3	RISK101A	Risk strategy game	S	Chris Gibbs
RMR Solitaire	5	S5RMRSOL	'Proper' solitaire	S	Ian Webster
RoboDungeon	3/5	RD-V3-5/S5-RD-10	Adventure/strategy	S	Ben Vaughan
Robots	3	ROBOTS	Strategy game	S	Andrew MacCormack
RockFall	5	ROCKFALL	Strategy game	S	Julian Samphire

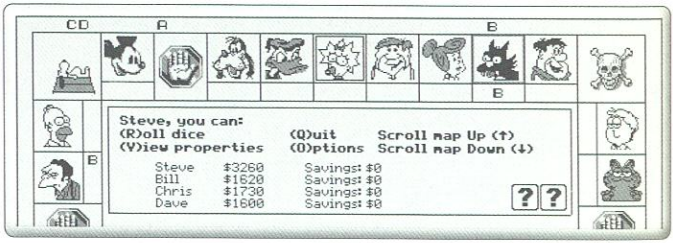
dTris: an addictive combination of Tetris and Dominoes

Name	m/c	Typical ZIP	Description	Typ.	Author/distributor
Rocky	3	ROCKY142	Rockfall strategy	F	Steve Godfrey
Roulette	3	ROULETTE	Roulette simulation	S	MD Shuckford
Same	3	SAME_V2	Table logic game	S	J.-Ph. Pasquier
SameGame	5	SAME5_11	Ball-removing logic game	F	Jon Read
Scrabble	3	n/a	The letter-based board game	C	Psion dealers
Shangai	3	SHANGAI	Mah-jong based solitaire game	S	Jean-Philippe Pasquier
Shanghai	5	S5-SH-11	MahJong tile memory game	S	Ben Vaughan
Shooting	3	SHOOTING	Rifle-aiming game	F	M.J.Horsnell
Shut The Box	3/5	STB10/STB5V10	Educational dice game	S	Steve Litchfield
Sinclair Spectr. Emul.	5	Z80	Run old Speccy games!	F	Palmtop BV
Slated	5	SLATED	Sliding tile puzzle	S	Matt Thomas
Snake	3	SNAKE20	Snake arcade game	S	Richard Smedley
Sokoban	3	SOKOBAN2	Object-pushing game	F	Gareth Richards
Sokoban	3	SOKOBAN	Object-pushing game	S	Didier Pirottin
Sokoboxx	5	SKB100EN	Sokoban puzzle clone	S	FatCatz/Palmscape
Solipeg	3	SOLPEG22	More marbles, more solitaire	F	Cade Roux
Solitaer	3	SOLIT101	Marble-jumping solitaire	F	Christian Netocny
Solitair	3	SOLITAIR	Card Solitaire	F	Dave Florish
Solitaire	3	SOLIT110	Another (good) card solitaire	F	Andy Giddings
Solitaire 3	3	SOL3	Card solitaire	S	Ian Webster
Solitaire Deluxe	5	SOL101EN	Cardplaying system, plugins avail.	F	FatCatz Software
Star Trek	3	STARTREK	Star Trek game	F	Tim Begley
Stigma	3	STIGMA	Marble-rolling arcade/strategy	S	Proteus Developments



Back to Jurassic Park—Ben Vaughan's dinosaur shoot-up

Name	m/c	Typical ZIP	Description	Typ.	Author/distributor
Stigma	5	n/a	Marble-rolling arcade/strategy	C	Psion
Sub-Mission	3	SUBV101	Submarine adventure	S	Nic Cusworth
Super Breakout	5	BREAKOUT	Arcade game	S	Tim Rohrer
Super Puzzle Engine	5	PUZZLE	2 player Tetris and more	F	Stephen Gallagher
Superslots	3	SLOTS	Slot machine simulation	F	Mike Waite
Target	5	TARGET	Gun-shooting game	F	Steven Prudames
Team Psion	5	n/a	Formula 1 management sim.	C	Psion
Tetris	3	TETRIS_2	Tetris arcade game	F	Steve Godfrey
Tetrums	3	TETRUMS	Combined tetris/columns game	F	Steve Godfrey
TileTrix	5	S5-TT-13	Tile strategy	S	Ben Vaughan
Tron	3	TRON	Light-cycles arcade	S	Didier Pirottin
Ultimate Poker	3/5	UPOKE229/POKER4D5	Poker simulation	S	Ian Pinkard
War	3/5	WAR_12/S5-WR-10	Artillery/strategy game	S	Ben Vaughan
Wari	3	WARIP100	Strategy game	F	Nick Matthews
Web World	3/5	WEBWO1D/WEBW5	Arcade adventure	S	Ian Webster
WildReels	5	WREELS14	Fruit machine simulator	S	Dave Wild
Willy	3	WILLY11	Platform adventure	S	Didier Pirottin
Woggle	3	WOGGLE	'Boggle' clone	F	Julian Toler
WordBox	5	WORDBOX	Boggle clone (word game)	F	Kevin G. Smotherman
Yartsie	5	YARTSIE	Dice game	F	Michael Jagger
Yatzee	5	YATZEE	Dice game	F	Dirk C Roennau

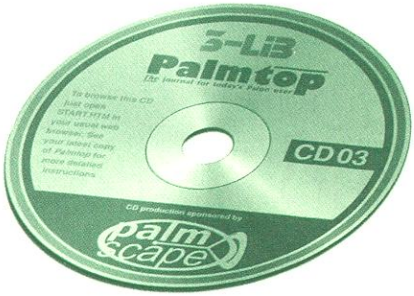


Fred Botton's 'Greedy'—some not-so-happy families

Using the Palmtop CD

Windows users who receive the CD should double-click on the file 'Start.htm'. On most PCs the web browser will leap into life and display the CD interface. If nothing happens, or if Windows asks how the file should be displayed, cancel the operation and install Microsoft Internet Explorer from the CD. Both 16 and 32-bit versions can be found in the 'msie' folder. After installation, try double-clicking on 'Start.htm' again.

- DOS, Amiga and Archimedes owners will be restricted in what they can view on the CD, but will still be able to browse the 3-Lib library section and copy off the software as needed.
- Macintosh users should simply drag the 'start.htm' file onto their web browser, where it will load the interface just as on a PC. Those without a browser can simply load the free copy of Internet Explorer 4 from the 'msie' folder. Please note that the Psion screen saver, demos and Emulators are all designed to run on PCs, so they will not work directly on your Mac.
- PC users please note that your operating system may set all files retrieved from the CD to 'Read-only'. This shouldn't cause a problem for 99% of applications, but you may have to manually change file properties (e.g. use [Control]-[P] on the Series 5 itself) if you have problems with running or de-installing software.
- PC users who install Internet Explorer should note that it often comes with its default start page set to *www.microsoft.com*, meaning that it tries to go online. Just go into its 'options' dialog and set the start page to a file local to your computer (e.g. the *Palmtop CD* Start.htm file).



Obtaining the Palmtop CD-ROM

The *Palmtop* CD-ROM is now given FREE with all new subscriptions and resubscriptions received.

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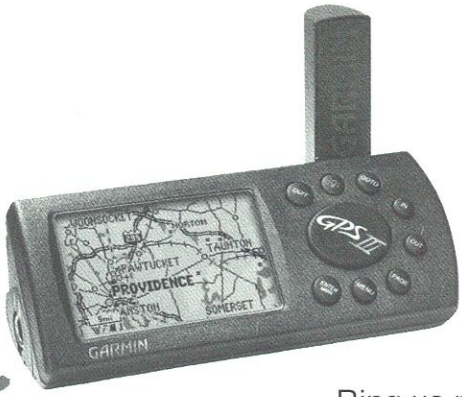

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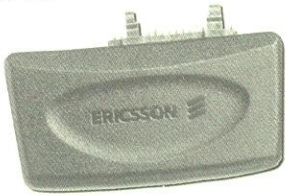

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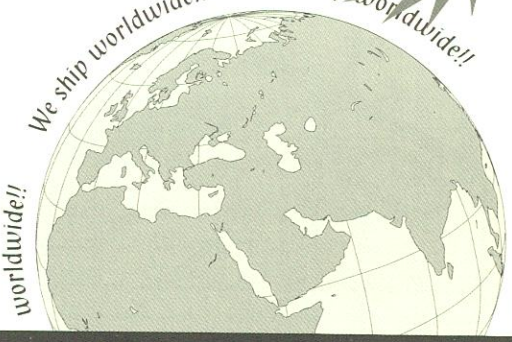

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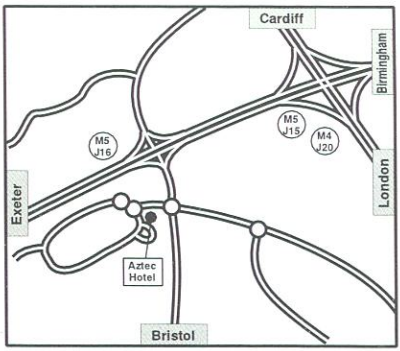

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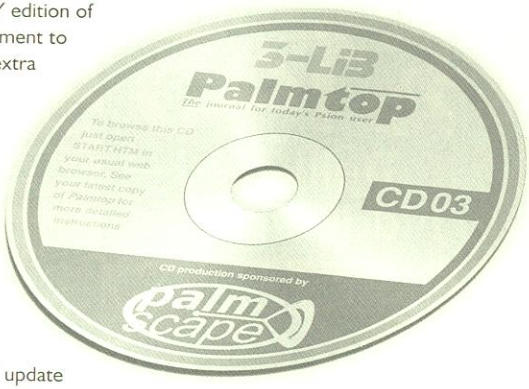

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*Alternatively, you can always buy single copies of the latest Palmtop CD from the **3-Lib** shareware library for £13 each. Tel: 0118 9265081 or send your cheque, payable to **Steve Litchfield** to 22 Grays Crescent, Woodley, Reading RG5 3EN.*

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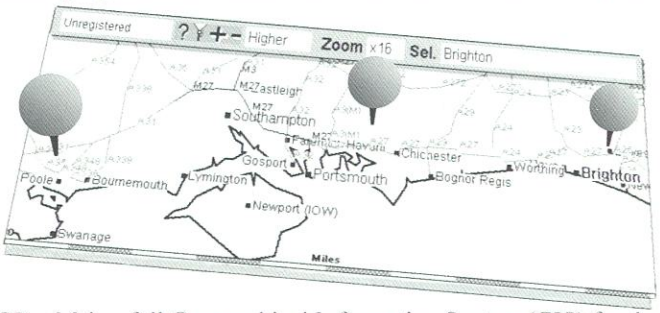

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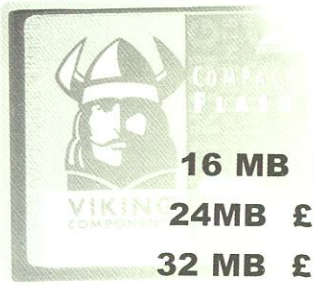

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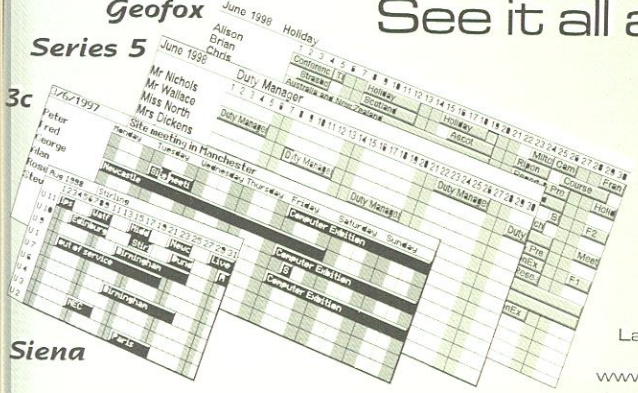

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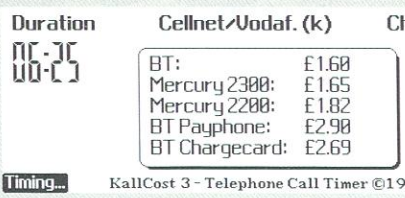

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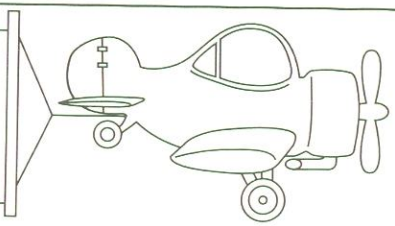

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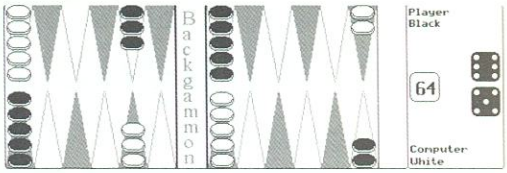

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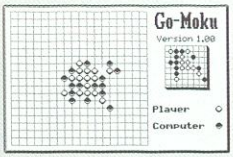

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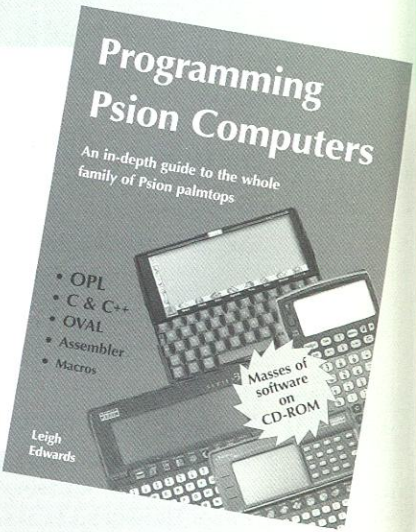

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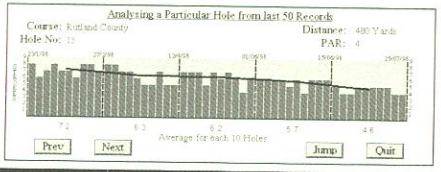

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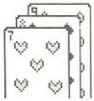

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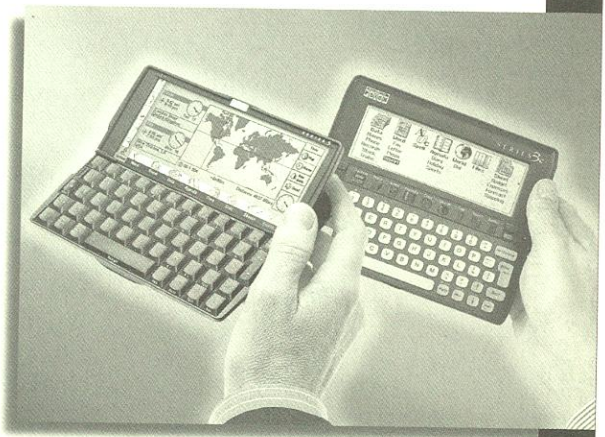

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on

SERIES 3c

SERIES 5

Next issue...

Planned for issue 21:

- Exchanging information between Series 5 and Series 3 machines
- A roundup of disk and file searching utilities
- The conclusion of our 'Working with DATA' series
- Advanced spreadsheet techniques
- Working for a living: the Teacher
- Starting up: How to hook up your Psion to a mobile telephone
- A look at using and making SIS installation files
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